

MATERIAL ENCOUNTERS: FASHION SUSTAINABILITY
EXAMINED THROUGH BEGINNERS' EXPERIENCES OF
LEARNING TO SEW CLOTHES AT HOME

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the experiences of beginners learning to sew clothes for themselves at home, considered in the context of fashion sustainability. The study investigates how people learn clothes sewing skills, the resources they use, and the difference this learning makes to their relationship with clothing. The research is informed by literature addressing sustainable fashion, fashion theory, craft theory, amateur craft and home sewing. Literature relating to design, sustainability, degrowth and new materialism provide a wider contextual frame for the study and its conclusions. The research uses a combination of qualitative, ethnographic and participatory methods, brought together in a novel configuration – the video elicitation/workshop (VIEW) encounter – in which participants' journals and self-recorded video clips informed conversations about their experiences of learning to sew clothes. Three themes, developed from an interpretative thematic analysis, are addressed.

Craft learning and emotion highlights contradictions between sewing's online portrayal and the material reality of learning to make clothes at home. The importance of home sewing outcomes relative to the enjoyment of the process challenges romantic notions of sewing.

Wearability of homemade clothes is identified as crucial to the satisfaction and enjoyment of sewing. Six wearability factors – fashion, fabric, fit, form, functionality and finish – are identified as contributing to the structural integrity of home-sewn clothes and their physiological and psychological fit for the maker-wearer.

Materiality considers the material aspects of digitally mediated contemporary clothes sewing practices: the material encounters, the embodied experiences, and the material circumstances in which they are situated. These aspects reveal the physical mechanics of clothes making and the reality of clothes as three-dimensional forms, inviting reflection on the materialities of clothing production within (and beyond) the home.

This thesis concludes that enhanced material engagement with clothes, through the process of trying to make them, alters sewists' perceptions of clothing and its production. The positive affective experiences of making, and the changed perceptions of clothing, indicate the potential of home sewing as a sustain-ability (an ability that enables people to behave more sustainably), while not necessarily offering a route to garments or sewing practices that are materially sustainable in their own right.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Unsustainable fashion

The dominant global fashion system of the twenty-first century is unsustainable. Over the last two decades, clothing consumption has escalated and the negative environmental impacts of the garment industry and clothing consumption practices in the global North have become increasingly apparent (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017, Environmental Audit Committee 2019). The acceleration of the climate crisis and wider public awareness of these issues has increased the urgency of work on fashion sustainability within both industry and academia. The recognition of the need for change has revealed differing views on the type of change that is needed, from divergent 'technocentric' and 'ecocentric' perspectives (Fletcher 2013: 565).

Technocentric solutions place an emphasis on industry and the development of technologies for cleaner, closed-loop circular economies. Those addressing the issue from an ecocentric orientation place emphasis on fashion practices and the need for wider cultural and systemic change within the industry and society more broadly (Payne 2019). In this PhD, I approach fashion sustainability from an ecocentric position in which the possibilities of cultural and systemic change are of interest.

1.2 Fashion as everyday practice

Drawing inspiration from design activism and fashion sustainability scholars Kate Fletcher and Amy Twigger Holroyd, and sociologist Joanne Entwistle, I take a broad view of fashion as situated embodied everyday practice (Entwistle 2015, Fletcher 2016, Twigger Holroyd 2017). As Entwistle puts it, 'humans are dressed bodies' (Entwistle 2015: 31). Consequently, we all participate in some way in fashion as a cultural phenomenon (Kaiser 2012). As deftly illustrated in Fletcher's *Craft of Use* (2016), there is an abundance of practices that occur and shape fashion once garments leave the shops. If we 'choose to look to the margins', Fletcher suggests, 'other fashion ideas and formulations are present and multifarious' (2016: 62). Following a similar line of thinking, Twigger Holroyd conceptualises fashion as a 'commons', open to all and resistant to 'enclosure' by the fashion industry (2017: 60). In this commons 'comprising all of the garments – new, old, fashionable, unfashionable – in existence' the folk

fashion practices of amateurs abound (2017: 58). It is in Twigger Holroyd's creative and collaborative commons that I find inspiration for this thesis, which focuses on the experiences of people learning to sew clothes for themselves. The home sewing and knitting of clothes are amongst the marginal forms of 'fashion provision and expression' identified by Fletcher (2016: 61-62). This research sheds light on home clothes sewing as a contemporary practice and to considers what place it might have in the imagination and realisation of alternative fashion futures.

1.3 Stitched seams

For historical, cultural and patriarchal reasons sewing has long been a highly gendered and consequently devalued skill. Literature addressing the domestic or commercial sewing of clothes is limited. The literature that is available provides a partial and fragmented picture of how sewing skills have been learnt and passed on over time – in school, in service, in factories and within the home – and suggests sewing in the UK, whether commercial or domestic, to have been predominantly the preserve of women (Burman 1999a). In both feminist literature and popular consciousness the home sewing of clothes, in particular, has retained strong associations with women's work of the past (see Section 3.3).

As ready-to-wear clothing became cheaper and more plentiful and other social and economic factors changed many women's working lives during the 1970s and 1980s, home sewing became less popular and less economically advantageous in the UK, much as Schofield-Tomschin demonstrates it did in the US (1999). The sale of paper sewing patterns, while still booming in the 1960s, declined significantly by the 1980s when many independent fabric stores and haberdasheries were also closed (Spanabel Emery 2020). As the mass production of ready-to-wear clothing grew, commercial clothing production also moved overseas and employment in the UK textile and clothing sector rapidly fell – by 90% between 1979 and 2013 (ONS 2014). As the perceived value of garment-making skills diminished, it seems these skills were less frequently passed on within the home or in UK schools. Consequently, garment making of any kind became less visible – or more marginalised – within UK culture towards the end of the twentieth century. However, stitched seams remain essential to the

construction of most clothing. Despite the global fashion industry's enormous scale and growth, the continual relocation in search of cheap (often synonymous with unprotected) labour has allowed the fashion industry to remain conspicuous in its relative lack of automation (Fine and Leopold 1993; Entwistle 2015; ILO 2019). People – mostly women – at sewing machines are significantly under-recognised and under-compensated within the current unsustainable fashion system (von Busch et al. 2017). In most mass-manufacturing industries, capital investment in machinery tends to replace people over time. This has not been the case in the garment industry where the 'individual worker at the individual machine is still the staple of clothing production' (Entwistle 2015: 213). The vast majority of clothing production still involves fabric being fed through a machine by hand.

A different group of practitioners, also overwhelmingly female, sit at the heart of this research: those choosing to learn to sew clothes for themselves. My intention is to understand experiences of home sewing in their contemporary UK context. I take an unsentimental view of this topic, neither looking nostalgically at a rose-tinted past, in which women enjoyed lovingly sewing clothes for themselves and their families at home, or its opposite, in which domestic sewing might be seen as endless drudgery. My intention, given sewing's increasing popularity, is to explore what the experience of those choosing to engage in clothes sewing at home can tell us that is of value in reimagining relationships with clothes in an altered and environmentally compromised future. The significance of stitched seams and those who sew them is the feminist thread running through this thesis, and the examination of fashion sustainability issues emerging from it.

1.4 Home clothes sewing

Home clothes sewing has seen a resurgence in popularity in the twenty-first century (Bain 2016). As with other crafts, this resurgence can be linked to the internet-enabled maker culture that emerged around the turn of the millennium (Gauntlett 2011, von Busch 2010) along with increased interest in 'sustainable' lifestyles. Home sewing's resurgence has come with its own evolving digital and material culture and even its own prime-time TV show: *The Great British Sewing Bee* (referred to hereafter as

Sewing Bee) attracted 4.9 million viewers in 2020 (Tilley 2020). Despite the increasing popularity of amateur clothes sewing, the practice has been paid relatively little academic attention when compared with knitting and other textile crafts (Bain 2016). Where home sewing is addressed directly, the focus is more frequently on the hand skills used to mend and alter clothes, rather than the machine sewing skills involved in garment construction. Research and practice promoting upcycling, clothing re-design or fashion ‘hactivism’ (von Busch 2008) – including using machine skills to restructure existing garments – often starts from a position of some prior sewing knowledge. This research focuses on the experiences of beginners learning clothes-sewing skills at home in the craft’s digitally entwined contemporary context.

1.5 Situating the researcher

Before outlining further details of the study I will introduce myself in relation to its subject matter, recognising that all practice, including research practice, is situated (Haraway 1988) and as a result my positionality has a bearing on it. Below I will touch on my sewing history, my craft and design practice and my academic and professional background. I do so in part because of the ‘unconventional’ – that is to say, non-linear – route that led me to embark on this PhD. I am encouraged by Jackie Goode’s auto-ethnographic account of her own relationship with clothes as a maker and a wearer (2016) and by Kate Fletcher’s recent ‘life writing’ to say a little more – ‘not because my life is interesting (it is not)’ (2021: 3) – but because my lived experience intersects with the subject matter of the study in several ways.

My sewing history

I am a white woman in my early 50s. I grew up in a middle-class household in a suburban town in the orbit of London. My dad worked in a professional public sector job while my mum took on a traditional housewife’s role looking after home and family. Growing up, I often wore homemade clothes, which were well made and much loved. I learnt to sew at home as a child, first by hand, then on a hand-cranked Singer, before starting to make my own clothes, aged around 13, with the help of my mum and her electric machine. This was in the late 1970s/early 1980s, when home sewing

and the passing on of sewing skills within the home were in decline. I was rare amongst my peers in having learnt to sew my own clothes.

My sewing continued throughout my teens and 20s, first to afford the clothes I wanted and then to have clothes that properly fitted when my body did not conform to what the shops provided. In the 1980s and 1990s many high street fashion brands did not routinely produce clothes beyond a size 14 or in anything but a 'standard' length. At 5ft 10ins, the words 'one size fits all' needled me – if I am not 'all', am I 'other'? After leaving home, I continued to make, adapt and alter new and secondhand clothes. I have used my sewing skills over the years for practical purposes, for fun and as a way to earn extra money. I have sewn for others as well as myself: making costumes for student productions, refitting a hand-me-down wedding dress for one friend, replicating a favoured maternity dress for another, and bringing a 'Meme Tent' to life as part of a third friend's MA Critical Design project (Clayton 2007). When others have sought my sewing skills it has more often than not been because I am the only person they knew with the know-how. This has meant that although I find sewing an enjoyably solitary pursuit, for me, making has always been connecting – with people, things and ideas (Gauntlett 2011).

Craft and design practice

I came to this research as a maker and designer with an MA in Creative Practice focused on textile print design, with craft theory and sustainable fashion as context. On graduating in 2016 I developed a micro-business designing and selling flat-pack cut-and-sew kits for beginners. The kits combined the flat pattern outline for a garment and its surface pattern, digitally printed on a single piece of fabric (Figure 1). The kits were the materialisation of a set of ideas linking print design, amateur craft and sustainability. The design of the kit encapsulated the idea of 'distributed competence' (Dant 2006, Watson & Shove 2008), such that some of the competence to make the garment was designed into the printed fabric itself (Cooke 2018). Inspired by Anne Kennedy's iconic Clothkits from the 1970s and using contemporary digital technology, the kits were produced on a print-to-order basis intended to minimise environmental impact and waste. My intention was to bring the pleasure of making a first garment

within reach of more people and to promote the learning of sewing skills in the process. The kits were launched at the Great Northern Contemporary Craft Fair in 2018, featured in magazines (The Simple Things¹, Actual Size²) and sold online. However, over the time it took to develop and launch the product, my environmental awareness and discomfort with the world of online marketing via social media platforms (Instagram and Facebook in particular) had grown. A more systemic perspective on the challenges of sustainability changed my orientation towards design. I realised that, for me, the design of textile products was an insufficient response to the clothing sustainability issues that concerned me. If anything, textile product design, however small-scale and well-intentioned, was as much part of the problem as the solution. I realised I was more interested in the motivations and experiences of those wanting to sew their own clothes – my potential customers – than I was in the marketing of more ‘stuff’. It was this realisation that inspired and informed the proposal for this PhD.

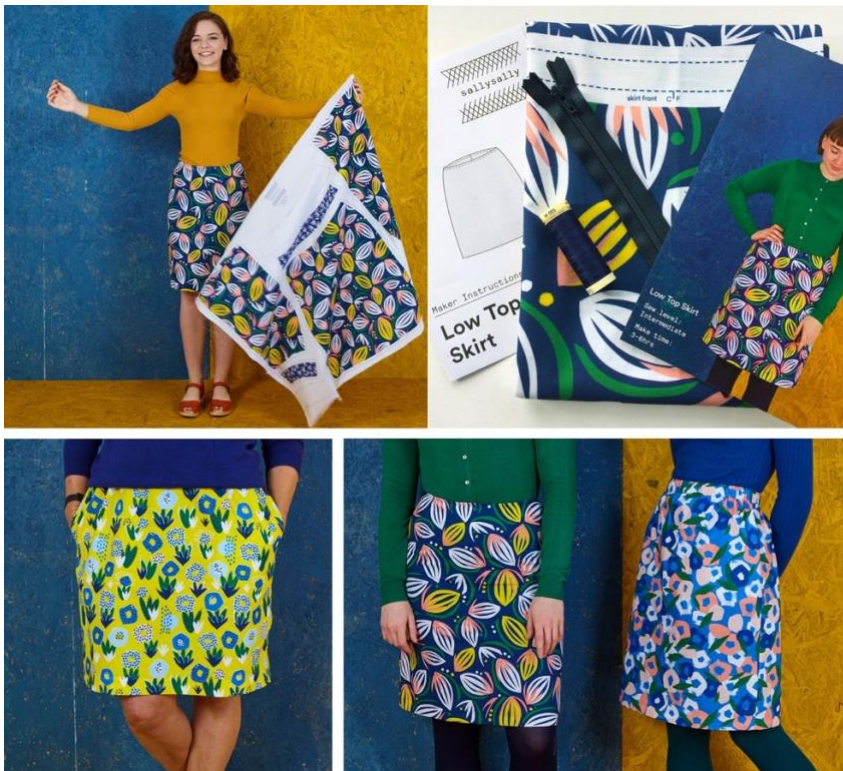


Figure 1- Flat-pack cut-and-sew kit for Low Top Skirt (top and centre bottom). Pocket Skirt (bottom left and right).

1 The Simple Things (2017) 'Things to want and wish for: Maker of the Month' (November), p.11.

2 Actual Size (2018) 'A stitch in time', Issue 2 (Winter), p.15.

Formal and informal education

Before starting my masters at Leeds Arts University in 2014 I pieced together my creative education largely through practice, engagement with friends in the art and design education sector and intermittent access to adult education programmes when time and money allowed (including a BTEC Diploma in Art & Design and multiple short courses in textile design, professional sewing techniques and pattern cutting³). My formal education before this consisted of three A-levels in STEM subjects (Maths, Chemistry & Biology) and an economics degree. As a teenager in the 1980s I was strongly encouraged, at home (being amongst the first generation to enter higher education) and at my comprehensive school, to preference science over art subjects irrespective of my interests. It is only now, in thinking about alternative routes for fashion and relationships with clothes, that some of this learning feels useful to me. Clothes *are* science (Czerski 2013) – fibres grown, extracted, extruded and treated through chemical and biological processes, formed into fabric and engineered into three-dimensional wearable objects. Fashion, in its current globally dominant form, *is* economics – ‘capitalism’s favourite child’, as Werner Sombart is often credited as saying (Briggs 2013, Stauss 2019).

After graduating from my first degree in 1990, uninspired by the economics I had been taught, I took my combined interests in social justice and secondhand clothes and went to work for Oxfam, first as a volunteer and then in a paid Assistant Shop Manager of a large shop in York. This experience and a subsequent charity shop management role were an education in themselves. I learnt a lot about clothes: about styles, materials, production values, what people buy and what they discard and about what is valued, or not, and by whom. I also learnt how much goes to waste and how common the misconception is that the charity shop customer is the charitable cause. I managed volunteers three times my age who, having grown up during the Second World War, sometimes had attitudes to waste that were at odds with the ‘standards’

³ Art & Design, Advanced Level (York College, 1994), Art & Design Portfolio Preparation (City Lit, 1996) Foundation Studies in Art & Design, BTEC Diploma (Camberwell College of Art, 1997/8), Professional Sewing Techniques (London College of Fashion, 2000), Introduction to Graphic Design (Central St Martins, 2003) Drawing & Painting for Textile Design (Central St Martins, 2007) Pattern Cutting (Morley College, 2008/9) Access to Higher Education in Art & Design, Diploma (Leeds College of Art, 2013/14).

required to maximise charity income from donated goods. Through my continued interest in charity shops as a customer over the years, I have witnessed the decline in the quality of textiles and clothing first hand.⁴ Compared with the clothes I was sorting 30 years ago, today's rails of rehashed styles recombined and rendered in unloved polyester and mixed fibres do not appear to be a testament to human progress or meaningful innovation. There must, I am sure, be other ways that the joys of fashion can be materialised in a more socially and ecologically responsible manner.

Professional background

Towards the end of the 1990s, my career in the voluntary sector moved on from shop and volunteer management to better-paid social policy roles – mostly concerning the relationship between voluntary and community organisations and government at local, regional and national level. These jobs paid my London rent and taught me a great deal: firstly, about the capacity of groups of committed individuals to make positive change, particularly for communities or individuals who otherwise lack recognition or support; secondly, how challenging it can sometimes be for not-for-profit organisations to remain responsive to need when faced with the audit culture of public funding bodies; thirdly, how positive intentions do not always lead to positive outcomes, especially if the intended beneficiaries of an intervention are absent from the decision making processes; and finally, the limitations of government policy as a means to bring about change. After completing my MA in 2016 I taught briefly part-time on Level 4 Textile Design and for two years on the MA Creative Practice at Leeds Arts University.

This personal, educational and professional background influences my perspective on design and the possibilities for cultural and systemic change in relation to fashion sustainability. I bring all these experiences and my reflexivity as a maker, designer and researcher to this study, which considers home sewing as an aspect of 'everyday life',

⁴ Oral and written evidence provided to the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee by the Clothing and Sustainability Research Group at Nottingham Trent University in 2018 highlights the impact of short lead in times in the fast fashion industry on clothing quality (precluding garment wash and wear testing) and the declining value of these garments to charity shops due to oversupply (EAC Fixing Fashion report 2019).

clothes as material things, and sustainability in fashion as an imperative in troubled and troubling times.

1.6 Situating the research

I will also situate the research in place and time. Any ethnographic research is influenced by the particular cultural context in which it is conducted. Consideration of context feels particularly important for this study because it was undertaken during the exceptional circumstances of the global Covid-19 pandemic, during which many aspects of 'everyday life' (e.g. social contact, home life, work patterns, parenting responsibilities, shopping etc.) – were disrupted. The social distancing restrictions of the pandemic altered the location of the research, required the methods to be changed and subtly shifted the focus of the study from what was originally envisaged. The pandemic also drew unexpected attention to the value and significance of the sewing skills being researched. In this section, I will expand briefly on these impacts as context for the study.

Time and place

The research on which this thesis is based took place in the northern English city of Leeds in the UK, between June 2020 and July 2022. The global Covid-19 pandemic was ongoing throughout much of this period. Social distancing restrictions put in place in response to the pandemic included three periods of national lockdown in England. The research was conducted in three phases: Phase I exploratory interviews, Phase II participatory craft research, Phase III in-person workshop and follow-up interviews. I had initially envisaged that Phase II of the research would be conducted in person through a series of workshops, interspersed with making activities carried out by participants at home; due to the pandemic, it was conducted entirely remotely. This change from in-person workshops to remote methods shaped the possibilities for the research and subtly influenced the direction of the study. While some things were lost in this shift, including the potential for co-design and for exploration of the social aspects of making, others were gained: working remotely enabled a richer, more nuanced and authentic insight into the experiences of people learning to make their

own clothes at home. The research design and methods used in the study are set out in full in Chapter 4.

Cultural context

Amongst the many unexpected impacts of Covid-19 was the enhanced visibility it gave to both the practical value of domestic sewing skills, and the precarious position of garment workers – those sewing clothes for a living – within the global fashion industry. Although already apparent, both these factors were brought into sharper focus by the pandemic, as discussed below.

The pandemic-induced sewing surge

The practical value of sewing was immediately highlighted by the pandemic when people started putting these skills to use in the production of face coverings for family and friends. Even the UK government issued instructions for how to make a face covering at home (Department of Health & Social Care 2020). In December 2020, Patrick Grant – Designer, Director of Community Clothing and presenter of *Sewing Bee* – promoted The Big Community Sew to bolster the voluntary sewing effort taking place in local communities (Grant 2020). This voluntary effort included mask-making and the more demanding production of non-surgical scrubs for medical professionals (Nolan 2020). The latter was co-ordinated by rapidly established groups such as Scrub Hub and For the Love of Scrubs and supported by local groups sharing downloadable patterns and co-ordinating distribution via Facebook (Murray 2020). It was clear from the online content associated with these activities that the vast majority of those making masks and scrubs were women, including amateurs and professionals, some of whom were furloughed from film and theatre costume wardrobes and other sewing-related businesses (BBC 2020, Murray 2020). In addition to this flurry of sewing activity taking place in response to the pandemic, home sewing also became a popular choice of hobby for those finding themselves with more time on their hands (Wood 2020). Again, the increased interest in sewing was evident on social media and also in the demand for domestic sewing machines; many basic models sold out in the UK during 2020 (Knott 2020). A heightened interest in sewing during the pandemic was also

evident in the enthusiasm of potential participants in this research (see Section 4.5) and the stories of some of those who became involved.

The #PayUp Campaign

At the same time as home sewing was surging in popularity, the Covid-19 pandemic was highlighting the vulnerability of garment workers sewing clothes for the globalised fashion industry. In March 2020, the fair pay advocacy organisation Remake instigated the #PayUp campaign to draw attention to the estimated \$40 billion in wages being withheld by fashion brands for clothing already produced or in production (Bobb 2020). By withholding payment, these brands threatened the livelihoods of thousands of garment workers who were at risk of not being paid for work already completed (Worker Rights Consortium 2021). The campaign was successful in recouping an estimated \$20 billion for garment workers from brands and retailers that had initially cancelled orders (UCRF 2020). PayUp Fashion was established in the wake of the campaign to sustain pressure on the industry to address poverty wages and worker safety through greater transparency, enforceable contracts and legislation to protect worker's rights. The organisation centres garment workers' voices and sees their fair treatment as the catalyst for change in the fashion industry.

Far from being exceptional, the issues provoking the #PayUp campaign are common. Poverty wages, wage theft and modern day slavery are all seemingly endemic in large parts of the fashion industry (Emran et al. 2019, Environmental Audit Committee 2019, International Labour Organisation 2019, Worker Rights Consortium 2021). These issues are symptomatic of the wider systemic problems that make the current global fashion system unsustainable. The consistent devaluation of hands-on garment production skills and the lives of garment workers – approximately 80% of whom are women (ILO 2019: 19) and 90% of whom are ununionised (EAC 2019: 13) – lies at the heart of the problem. By focusing on clothes making – albeit through the experiences of amateurs doing so within the home – this study attempts, in its own way, to highlight and re-evaluate the skills involved in sewing clothes and make the hands that sew them more visible.

1.7 Research outline

Having presented a broad introduction to the subject of this thesis and introduced myself and the context within which the research was undertaken, I will now introduce the study itself, including the overarching aim, research questions and the structure of the thesis.

The overarching aim of the study is to examine what the experiences of amateur sewists reveal that could be useful in deepening our understanding of fashion sustainability issues. This research focuses on the experiences of sewing beginners choosing to learn to make their own clothes for the first time. It is a practice-informed, participatory study conducted from a feminist perspective. A combination of qualitative, ethnographic (Pink 2015, Woodward 2020) and participatory (Twigger Holroyd 2013, Hackney et al. 2020) methods, including semi-structured interviews, participatory craft practice, journaling and video elicitation techniques are used. The study is framed by three core research questions:

- How are basic sewing and clothes construction skills learnt at home?
- What resources help people to learn basic sewing and clothes construction skills?
- How does learning basic sewing and clothes construction skills change home sewists' relationships with clothes?

A fourth question, developed through close empirical exploration of the above three, links the findings to the overarching fashion and sustainability context for the study:

- To what extent can home sewing be seen as a sustain-ability and what role might it therefore have as a tactic in the transition to more sustainable fashion futures?

The formulation of these questions, the research design and the methods used are set out in full in Chapter 4. The mode of analysis throughout the study is interpretative;

data transcripts were inductively coded and analysed to identify common themes and divergent experiences for further discussion. This analysis is set out in Chapters 5-8.

The project highlights the knowledge and skills required to sew clothes and explores how these skills are learnt and applied by beginners within the home. It looks at the types of tools and resources that help and hinder those learning to sew, and the difference that gaining sewing skills makes to their relationship with clothes. In doing so, the research elucidates the digitally entwined nature of contemporary home sewing practices and opens these practices up to critical reflection in their own right and as potential tactics in response to the challenges of fashion sustainability (Payne 2021a, 2021b). Paying close attention to the sewing of clothes is a way of ‘staying with the trouble’ of our current fashion predicament. Staying with the trouble, Haraway tells us:

requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters and meanings.
(2016: 1)

The research sheds some much-needed light on the activity of sewing clothes at home and uses this insight to contribute to debates about sustainable fashion futures, the value of amateur craft skills and the importance of material engagement to future human and non-human flourishing.

1.8 Thesis structure

The first five chapters, set out the rationale for the research, the methods used and the initial findings from Phase I of the project. Chapter 2, *Design, Sustainability and Paradigmatic Change*, sets out the overarching context for the research. Chapter 3, *Fashion Sustainability, Craft and Clothes Sewing*, provides a review of literature addressing key themes informing the research and analysis of findings that follow. Chapter 4, *Methodology*, explains the research approach and methods used in the study, including reflections on research in practice. Chapter 5, *Learning to Sew Clothes*

at Home, provides an introduction to contemporary sewing practices and resources based on semi-structured interviews conducted in Phase I.

Chapters 6–8 present findings and discussion primarily based on Phase II of the research. Chapter 6, *Craft Learning & Emotion*, explores the resources that the participants used to inform their sewing practices and the emotions involved in their experiences of using them. Chapter 7, *Wearability*, introduces six aspects of ‘wearability’ – fashion, fabric, fit, form, functionality, and finish – and discusses how sewing culture, context and resources support the making of clothes that maker-wearers consider to be wearable. Chapter 8, *Materiality*, takes a material-oriented view of the research participants’ learning experiences and considers how materialities shape beginners’ experiences of sewing.

Chapter 9 briefly presents participant reflections from Phase III of the project and summarises the key findings of the study, including their limitations and significance in relation to home sewing, fashion sustainability and the overarching context introduced in Chapter 2. This final chapter also identifies the contribution to knowledge of this research, and suggests implications for further research and practice.

CHAPTER 2 - DESIGN, SUSTAINABILITY & PARADIGMATIC CHANGE

The subject of this thesis is the amateur sewing of clothes, approached from a craft and design perspective informed by my own practice as a maker and designer. The fashion sustainability context within which this research is situated links to a much wider set of socio-economic, ecological and political issues. In this chapter, I will introduce the work of design thinkers from whom I have drawn inspiration in my approach to this research.

Firstly, I will introduce two publications – Tony Fry’s *Design Futuring* (2009) and Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham’s *Earth Logic* (2019) – which articulate the interconnectedness of design practice with its wider ecological, social and economic context. Both publications identify a need for paradigmatic change in design and its wider context if the rate of change – toward more sustainable practices – is to be sufficient to respond to the challenges presented by the climate and ecological crisis. Secondly, I will illustrate the shortcomings of a ‘business-as-usual’ approach and introduce two fields of thinking – those of degrowth and new materialism – that I have found particularly useful in considering paradigmatic change and the subject matter of my research. Both degrowth and new materialism are interdisciplinary, drawing in strands of thinking from science and the humanities to develop complex analyses of the dominant paradigm that is proving so problematic for the planet that sustains us all. Finally, I will summarise how this thinking has influenced the research that follows.

2.1 Design context

Design futuring

In *Design Futuring* (2009), design theorist Tony Fry presents an overarching and largely rhetorical stance on the place of design in relation to sustainability. He emphasises the ontological character of design, highlighting the central role that design plays in the creation and destruction of both material things and ways of living:

Design – the designer and designed objects, images, systems and things – shapes the form, operation, appearance and perceptions of the material world we occupy. (Fry 2009:3)

Understood in this way, all designed things ‘go on designing’ (ibid.) as they shape the world we live in, our perception of the world and how we live in it. Fry argues that design is therefore heavily implicated in the existential threat presented to humanity by irreversible climate change *and* has a vital role to play in responding to it.

Fry introduces the idea of ‘the Sustainment’, which he defines as ‘the arrival of a moment of continual material and cultural change to keep what sustains in dominance’ (Fry 2009: 45). In naming the Sustainment, Fry intentionally evokes an equivalence to the Enlightenment, which he describes as ‘a prefigurative project driven by profound dissatisfaction with “the state of the world”’ (2009: 201). In making this link, Fry highlights both the enormity of the endeavour (of the Sustainment) and the power of the preceding paradigm (the Enlightenment), which still substantially informs dominant world views today. The sustainment of a liveable planet, Fry argues, will not be achieved without confronting the enormity of the problem. If we are to be successful in this project, he suggests, ‘it will not be by chance but...by design’ (2009: 6). Put simply, Fry suggests, “‘To be” we have to be another way’ (2009: 22).

Following this line of thinking, Fry’s argument is not for ‘sustainable design’, as it has been variously defined and explored since the 1990s, but for ‘sustain-ability’. Fry uses the word sustain-ability to ‘suggest a more materially grounded objective and agency’ (2009: 7) that requires more substantial change to ‘the artefactual world we create, use and occupy’ (ibid.). So, while ‘sustainable design’ might create items made from alternative materials or use renewable rather than fossil fuels, design for sustain-ability would enable alternative, less environmentally impactful, ways of living to be seen as possible, accessible and desirable. As artefacts and environments that enable lives to be lived more sustainably ‘go on designing’, they lead us towards the Sustainment. In the context of the Sustainment, Fry sees all design as directive practice which can be either ‘futuring’ or ‘defuturing’ – with the former being that which

prolongs the future for humanity on earth. Amongst the things that might be considered ‘futuring’ practices, Fry includes both dematerialisation and rematerialisation. Dematerialisation, he suggests, might be characterised by the paperless office. Rematerialisation, on the other hand, might include growing your own vegetables in an urban front garden to produce food, reconnect with food production, and make the possibility of this practice more visible to others. An understanding of rematerialisation that brings production closer to home, making the process and practice more visible, applies equally to clothes as to food. This research engages with the rematerialisation of clothes in these two senses: their physical materialisation and their materiality.

Earth logic

In their *Earth Logic: Fashion Action Research Plan*, Fletcher and Tham (2019) also assert the need for paradigmatic change in response to the challenges presented by climate change. Writing from a fashion and sustainability perspective, Fletcher and Tham would agree with Fry that a viable future for the earth and humanity requires present modes of living (particularly those dominant in the global North) to become rapidly outmoded. Fletcher and Tham are unapologetic in naming the paradigm they believe we need to move towards as one ‘where earth comes first’ (2019: 19).

[P]utting earth first is, we suggest, essential if we are to strike out upon pathways that genuinely address both the scale and speed of change required within the climate emergency. (2019: 8).

This ‘earth first’ paradigm is contrasted with the current paradigm based on ‘economic growth logic’ which drives the fashion’s system’s ‘conspicuous over-production’ and associated harms (2019: 9). In making the case for change, the authors reiterate the timeframe outlined in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report (2018), which gives the international community until just 2030 to ‘avert the devastating effects of climate change’ (Fletcher & Tham 2019: 8). They also highlight the growth and impact of the fashion industry, using some frequently cited sources, including the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017). Some key statistics are provided for context in

Table 1. As well as highlighting the scale of growing production, waste and pollutants resulting from the fashion industry, Fletcher and Tham emphasise the scale of change thought to be necessary if we are to stay within ecological and planetary boundaries. At the conservative end of the scale, Fletcher and Tham tell us, a 75% (or four-fold) decrease in resource consumption or increase in resource efficiency may be necessary (Weizsäcker et. al 1997 paraphrased in Fletcher & Tham 2019: 10), with others suggesting a higher figure. Either way – 75% or above – it is evident that our actual resource use is going in the opposite direction. The many actions that are being taken in the name of sustainability are not currently commensurate with the scale of the problem. Fletcher and Tham suggest that multiple technocentric initiatives relating to materials and metrics have offered a ‘false sense of progress’ (Fletcher and Tham 2019: 12). The Global Fashion Agenda industry update from 2019, which Fletcher and Tham quote, also acknowledges the ongoing problem of growth outstripping the implementation of sustainable solutions:

[F]ashion companies are not implementing sustainable solutions fast enough to counterbalance negative environmental and social impacts of the rapidly growing fashion industry (Lehmann et al. 2019: 1)

The same report goes on to say that this mismatch between the industry’s sustainable ambitions and growth ‘could have a dire effect on the long-term environmental, social and financial prosperity of the industry and planet’ (Lehmann et al. 2019:2). This leads Fletcher and Tham to conclude that:

If the [fashion] sector is serious about climate change, biodiversity loss and the interplaying social and economic injustice – like many who work within it claim – then systemic work is essential. (Fletcher and Tham, 2019: 3)

Echoing Fry’s earlier reflections on the role of design, Fletcher and Tham emphasise fashion’s potential as a catalyst for change:

The omnipresence of fashion, its alluring emotional language and its pivotal role in the expression of identity formation and communication position it, as well as a driver of consumption and production, as a potentially auspicious agent of change. (2019:10).

One of the challenges of instigating systemic change, as Fletcher and Tham recognise, is that the established paradigm can be hard to see, as it is ‘so to speak, the water we swim in’ (2019: 19). Taking inspiration from environmental scientist and systems thinker Donella Meadows, Fletcher and Tham suggest that it is by working at the level of the paradigm – ‘where the goal and purpose of the system arises’ – that new understandings can be nurtured and the pace of change accelerated (Meadows 1997 cited in Fletcher & Tham 2019:24). Again following Meadows, Fletcher and Tham suggest that insufficient progress is being made because parameters are being changed only *within* the current paradigm of economic growth logic.

Table 1: Growth, environmental impact, waste and garment workers.

Fashion growth and impact
<p>Clothing production approximately doubled in the 15 years to 2015 (1) and is projected to rise a further 63% – from 62 million to 102million tons – by 2030. (2)</p> <p>The fashion industry is responsible for 8- 10% of global carbon dioxide emissions (3). The dyeing and treatment of textiles accounts for 20% of industrial water pollution, with clothing accounting for 60% of textile use (1). The fashion industry contributes 35% of microplastic pollution (3). The use of synthetic fibres in clothing is estimated to have doubled since 2000. (4).</p> <p>In the UK, we buy more clothes per person than anywhere else in Europe (4). An estimated 300,000 tonnes of textiles go into household waste every year, 20% of which goes to landfill, 80% of which is incinerated (4). Only 20% of clothing globally is collected for reuse or recycling (2). Only 1% of clothing is recycled into new clothes. (1).</p> <p>Women make up approximately 80% of the garment production workforce (5). Over 50% of that workforce are not paid the minimum wage in countries where clothing is produced, with a significant gender pay gap underlying this figure (2). The vast majority of garment workers – over 90% – have not collective voice on pay and conditions (4) or ‘aspirations for their industry’. (5).</p> <p>(1) Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017), (2) Global Fashion Agenda (2017), (3) Niinimäki et al. (2020), (4) Environmental Audit Committee (2019), (5) International Labour Organisation (2019).</p>

Earth Logic lays out a set of values that ‘flow’ from the earth first paradigm (Fletcher & Tham 2019: 19). These values include understanding the interdependency (of people and planet), practices of care and diverse ways of knowing, which are common themes in feminist research and discussions around decolonisation (Machado de Oliveira 2021). The action plan identifies six areas of work to transform the fashion sector, presented as ‘holistic landscapes’ under the headings Less, Local, Plural, Learning, Language and Governance (2019:7). The first three address issues relating to scale and diversity within fashion directly. The second three address the processes and structures supporting the fashion system (ibid.). The plan is designed to be generative, inclusive and interdisciplinary, with economics, politics, psychology, sociology, cultural studies, consumer studies, journalism, anthropology, human geography, education, design, social and fashion practice, community engagement and home economics all being identified as having a part to play. The language of the action plan is purposely ‘earth first’ – referencing flows and landscapes – conveying the understandings that the plan is designed to nurture. The choice of action research as a methodology is also aligned to the intentions of *Earth Logic*, to generate an ‘activist knowledge ecology’ (2019: 15) and enhance the pace of change across the fashion system. Action research⁵ embraces the complex and situated nature of all social practice, is inherently participatory and enables positive change to be nurtured through the process of research, rather than introduced post hoc into situations that will inevitably have moved on.

The participatory research informing this thesis, although not strictly speaking action research (in the sense of intentionally promoting any particular change amongst those participating) has been carried out in the spirit of *Earth Logic*. By engaging with the hyper-local example of people learning to sew clothes for themselves at home, this research considers what the experience of amateur sewists, largely overlooked in academic and fashion terms, might tell us that is useful in contemplating ‘less’ – or, to

⁵ Which I understand to have a history dating back to the work of Kurt Lewin in the 1930s (Adelman 1993) and to have been used in pedagogic, community development, public health settings and in feminist research from the 1970s onwards. Jackie Goode describes action research as having ‘a long pedigree in the social sciences where, for example, it is seen to enhance the effectiveness of efforts to bring about social change’ (Townsend et al. 2017: 195).

pick up on Fletcher and Tham’s use of Donna Haraway’s conceptualisation, ‘staying with the trouble’ of less (Haraway, 2016). That is, not to reduce or over-simplify the challenge for analytical expedience or greater comfort but to look more closely at what ‘less’, in this context, might entail.

2.2 Wider economic and material context

Fry, Fletcher and Tham emphasise the need for paradigmatic change if we are to respond adequately to the existential threat presented by human-induced climate change. In both cases the authors identify our current dependency on economic growth at all costs as problematic. They also emphasise the powerful role that design can play in understanding and nurturing change. These are challenging ideas. As Fletcher and Tham note, to suggest change of this nature can lead to accusations of ‘being political’ (2019:23) or ‘naïve’ (2019:1), while those making such accusations fail to acknowledge the extent to which the status quo is also political and increasingly ‘unrealistic’ (2019: 18). The economic growth logic underpinning our current paradigm and the systems, policies and structures that hold it in place are themselves reinforced by particular ways of looking at the world, which warrant re-examination in light of present and urgent environmental challenges. In this section I will illustrate the problem of ‘business as usual’ before going on to look at two interdisciplinary fields of study which embrace the re-examination of current dominant ways of understanding the world. The first is degrowth, a school of economic thought which acknowledges the ecological context for all economic activities and aims to develop economic models that are compatible with a finite planet. The second is new materialism, a locus of intersecting strands of thought emanating from science and the humanities, which foreground the ‘material’ (in all senses) foundations of life. These two sets of ideas are helpful to me in considering the place of amateur clothes sewing practices in our current cultural context and the potential of such practices as tactics in response to the challenge of future fashion sustainability.

Business as usual

The economic paradigm that Fry, Fletcher and Tham critique as unsustainable is one in which perpetual economic growth is necessitated by the economic system itself,

irrespective of social and environmental consequences. This logic – described as ‘capital logic’ by Fry and ‘economic growth logic’ by Fletcher and Tham – is the foundation on which our current fashion system is built. The ‘logic’ of this system has a lineage that can be traced back to the Enlightenment thinking of social philosopher and political economist Adam Smith. Smith, who is credited as the founding father of modern economics, introduced the idea of the ‘invisible hand’ to explain how markets for goods and labour arise and adjust in relation to the needs and interests of a society. Smith first articulates the concept of the ‘invisible hand’ in relation to economic matters in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1759:

[The rich] consume little more than the poor; and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own convenience, through the sole end which they propose from the labours of all the thousands whom they employ be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants; and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species. (1759: 270).

Smith uses the ‘invisible hand’ in this passage to describe, with some derision, how a certain class of wealthy merchants of his day, through their own self-interest, can be seen to inadvertently advantage others (Rothschild 1994). Smith’s use of the ‘invisible hand’ in this passage is primarily as metaphor (ibid.). The outcome, as expressed in the second sentence of this passage, was no more factually true in 1759 (70 years before the Abolition of Slavery Act) than it is today. However, Smith’s later use of the ‘invisible hand’ concept in making the case for free international trade (ibid.) has been hugely influential in the history of economic thought, including today’s dominant growth logic discourse. Economic historian Emma Rothschild (1994), social and environmental economist Kate Raworth (2017) and ecological economist Tim Jackson (2021) all suggest that, dislocated from their original context, Smith’s ideas have been

misinterpreted. In Raworth's view, Smith's foundations, distilled down through the neoliberal economic project of the second half of the twentieth century, have resulted in mainstream economic thinking summed up in the belief that 'the market is efficient, that trade is win-win and that the commons are a tragedy' (2017: 62).

Despite two and a half centuries of economic thinking since Adam Smith first introduced the idea of the invisible hand, echoes of this contested concept are still evident in debates about fashion and sustainability. For example, in a BBC-hosted discussion on *The Morality of Fashion* (BBC 2019) Tim Worstall of the Adam Smith Institute⁶ asserted that 'The only way that we've ever actually found to cure abject poverty is to have an industrial revolution and these normally start with textiles' (BBC 2019). He argued that by expanding the fashion industry, everyone is better off because – via the 'natural' workings of the economy – wealth increases overall. In defending this position Worstall disregards the negative impacts of the industry, including poverty wages, wage theft and modern day slavery (Worker Rights Consortium 2021, ILO 2019, PayUp Fashion 2020) and the growing global problems of textile waste (Ricketts & Skinner 2023).

The same logic is apparent when H&M Chairman Karl-Johan Persson criticised Greta Thunberg for the pessimism of her message and warned of the 'terrible social consequences' of reduced consumption (Hoikkala 2019a&b). While the livelihoods of garment workers is an essential consideration in any transformation of the fashion industry, capital logic absolves Persson from direct concern for these workers, whose *real* hands are all but invisible, and voices rarely heard, in this debate (von Busch et al. 2017). Instead, the burden of concern is placed on consumers, who are increasingly aware of the social and environmental costs of accelerated and accelerating consumption. H&M was amongst the brands that initially cancelled or postponed orders in Bangladesh and elsewhere at the start of the Covid pandemic, despite the dire implications for the lives and livelihoods of garment workers (see Section 1.6).

⁶ A neoliberal think tank promoting free market economic ideas, influential on the right of British politics.

Although the company subsequently paid for completed and in-process orders, their record in relation to worker compensation and safety remains questionable.

H&M is used here as an illustration, not because it is necessarily any better or worse than any other fast fashion brand but because this high-profile example lays the economic reasoning bare. The suggestion that consumers in the global North (and increasingly elsewhere in the world) must keep buying cheap fashion products for the well-being of garment workers in places like Bangladesh in the global South appears disingenuous when expressed from the perspective of an industry seen to withdraw so readily in a crisis. The logic behind the suggestion that continual consumption is the key to worker well-being has its origins in the Enlightenment idea of the ‘invisible hand’. This logic ignores the link between high volume, fast turnaround production and the unsafe and unfair practices that are seemingly endemic within much of the fashion supply chain. In their economic growth logic Worstall and Persson (used here as illustrative examples) place blind faith in the mechanisms of the economy, while turning a blind eye to the real hands at work in making clothes and the impact of fashion’s overproduction on the planet. These arguments bear close resemblance to those put forward by colonialists of a previous era (Hickel 2021) and perpetuate differential concern for whose lives really matter.

As can be seen in the examples above, capital logic – in which shareholder primacy results in the interests of those with capital to invest taking priority (Raworth 2017) — places the ‘need’ for growth first, while negative social and environmental impacts of growth are either unacknowledged or externalised. Meanwhile, the drive for perpetual growth incentivises a race to the bottom in terms of wages and material quality and amplifies the clamour for ever-increasing sales, resulting in a doubling of clothing production between 2000 and 2014 (Ellen Macarthur Foundation 2017). To illustrate the logical consequence of the drive for perpetual growth, Raworth explains that if something grows at a rate of 3%, its size will double every 23 years. The \$80billion scale of the global economy in 2015 with a growth rate of 3% ‘would be nearly three times bigger by 2050, over ten times bigger by 2100, and – astonishingly, 240 times bigger by 2200’ (2017: 248). These increases, she emphasises, are not due to inflation

but the nature of compound growth. Contemplating the implications of endless growth, Raworth suggests:

Most economists, like the rest of us, would be hard pressed to envisage a thriving global economy of such extraordinary proportions, especially given the stress that human activity already puts on the planet, and so they may prefer to wave the implications off to the horizon. (2017: 248)

Raworth, it seems, would agree with Fletcher and Tham that economic growth logic involves a ‘fantastical’ and even ‘escapist’ attitude to resource limits (Fletcher and Tham 2019: 27) and that a business-as-usual approach is increasingly ‘illogical’ (2019: 4). In contrast, many ecological economists, environmental scientists and socially and environmentally conscious designers, including those quoted above, are choosing to stay with the trouble, looking for ways to redraw models for economics and design to fit within planetary boundaries. As a maker, designer, researcher and former economics student I am interested in the interdisciplinary overlap between design and economics and how ‘staying with the trouble’ (Haraway 2016) opens up opportunities to see, and think about, issues of fashion sustainability – and the fundamental role of sewing within it – differently.

Degrowth

As explained above, the incompatibility of infinite economic growth on a finite planet is becoming increasingly apparent, not just to environmental scientists and climate activists but those working across disciplines, including design (Fry 2009; Boehnert 2018, Fletcher & Tham 2019) and economics (Raworth 2017; Hickel 2020 & 2021, Kallis 2018, Jackson 2021). There is now a growing conversation about sustainability necessitating paradigmatic change and socially just transition to alternative post-growth models (Hopkins 2019, Raworth 2017, Hickel 2020 & 2021, Jackson 2021, Machado de Oliveira 2021, Hine 2023). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report of 2018 set out the challenge of limiting global temperatures to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels to avoid the worst effects of irreversible climate change (IPCC 2018). To meet the ambitions of the UN’s 2015 Paris Agreement, this

report suggested that global CO₂ emissions needed to be reduced by 45% by 2030 and to reach net zero by 2050. Since then, the global economy's material footprint and CO₂ emissions have continued to rise (Raworth 2017; Hickel 2020, UNEP 2022, Kallis 2018): there is now less time to solve a still-growing problem. The most recent United Nations Environment Programme's Emissions Gap report warns of a 'closing window' of opportunity to stay within the 1.5 degree limit and states clearly on its cover that the 'climate crisis calls for rapid transformation of societies' (2022). The uneven distribution of the causes and consequences of climate change between the global North and South – where the global North is responsible for the majority of negative climate impacts and the devastating and costly consequences are experienced disproportionately in the global South – make the problem not just one of scale and urgency but also one of social, environmental and economic justice.

The problem with growth, as Jason Hickel explains, is that even green growth strategies – which posit continual economic growth with reduced climatic impact – require rapid transition to renewable sources of energy and 'decoupling' of economic growth from resource use (Hickel 2021). Transition to renewable energy is made more difficult by growth-led increases in energy demand (including strategies for dematerialisation that rely on energy intensive digital goods and services). Material decoupling is not happening fast enough to outpace growth in production in many parts of the global economy (Hickel 2021), including the fashion industry (Fletcher & Tham 2019, Lehmann et al. 2019). Others conclude, based on modelling for energy demand and material extraction, that 'growth in GDP ultimately cannot plausibly be decoupled from growth in material and energy use' (Ward et al. 2016: 10). Yet, in the current growth-dependent economic model, the demands of capital make increasing scale and profit an imperative for companies and growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP, see below) a necessity for nations – irrespective, in both cases, of the implications for human lives, livelihoods or the environment (Raworth 2017, Hickel 2020).

In making an argument for alternative economic models, economists such as Raworth and Jason Hickel challenge some of the fundamental tenets of dominant economic

thinking. GDP, for example, has come to be used as the primary measure of the economic health of individual nations – and, when combined, the global economy. However, this metric was not believed to be a suitable measure for economic progress even by Kuznets, who was largely responsible for devising it as a way to assess economic output during the 1930s (Raworth 2017). The problem with GDP growth as a measure is that it measures growth in economic outputs whether they are ‘good’ or ‘bad’. It does not measure, therefore, ‘the enormous value of goods and services produced by and for households, and by society in the course of daily life’ (Raworth 2017: 39). Things that are not counted include care, which feminist economists have long argued are essential to life and economic activity, and activities that contribute to well-being, including social connection, curiosity about our surroundings, ongoing learning, physical activity and giving (or sharing) with others (Aked et al. 2008).

Raworth’s concept of ‘doughnut economics’ expertly illustrates an alternative vision for economics (Figure 2). In Raworth’s model the image of a ring doughnut is used to represent the zone within which a just and climate-compatible economy should exist. The hole at the centre of the doughnut represents the space below the level at which poverty and degradation render lives unlivable. On the outside of the doughnut is the space beyond safe environmental limits. Our economic activities should not breach this line if our aim is to maintain the relatively benign climatic conditions that are compatible with human and more-than-human life. Moving the global economy into the space of the doughnut between these inner and outer limits, Raworth explains, requires a move away from GDP as the dominant measure of nations’ economic success. Although Raworth positions herself as being agnostic about growth, the transition away from growth as the dominant economic logic and towards an economy that is compatible with the planet’s ecosystems is termed by others ‘degrowth’.

Degrowth is a planned reduction in energy and resource use designed to bring the economy back into balance with the living world in ways that reduce inequality and improve human well-being (Hickel 2020: 1)

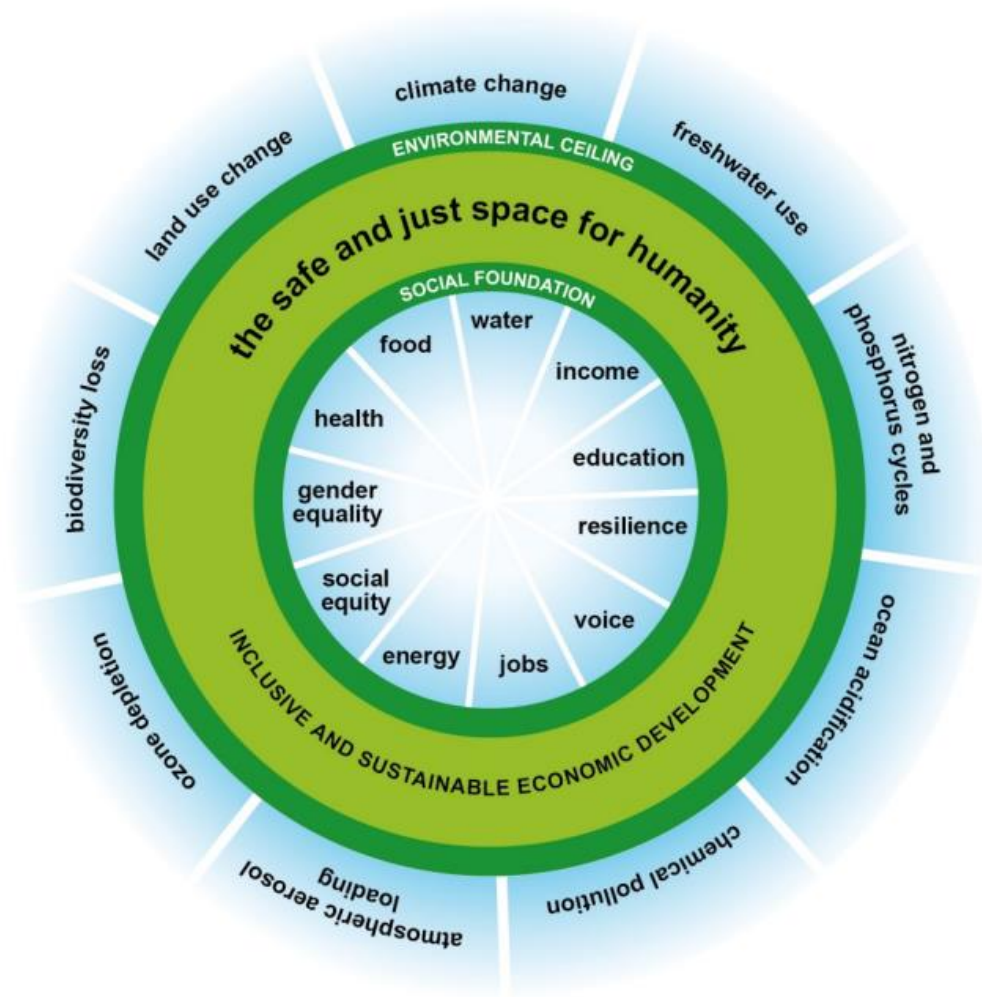


Figure 2 - First illustration of doughnut economics concept (Raworth 2012: 4)

Degrowth, Hickel explains, 'is not about reducing GDP but rather about reducing material and energy throughput' (ibid.: 2). Degrowth requires that we are more discerning about which parts of any economy expand or contract. The likelihood, Hickel acknowledges, is that reducing throughput will reduce GDP, and should be prepared for. In contrast to cyclical recessions, in which unplanned reductions in GDP wreak havoc on people's lives, degrowth involves careful planning.

Ideas of degrowth (the process of transition) and post-growth (the alternative systems to transition towards) are challenging because perpetual economic growth is central to the current economic model and the thinking that supports alternative models has

long been sidelined.⁷ Although economists of the past appear to have held science in high esteem and emulated scientific disciplines in the development of their own, the dominant economic models emerging from the twentieth century seem to have lost sight of environmental and ecological limits to economic activity that the natural sciences now make increasingly clear (Raworth 2017). The economic models we choose to use have serious and costly implications (socially, environmentally *and* economically) far beyond the countries in whose self-interest they have largely been developed. As Raworth explains: ‘Economics, it turns out, is not a matter of discovering laws: it is essentially a question of design’ (2017: 211). We made the economy we currently have, and in light of that might learn to remake a different one. This suggestion is not, as its detractors might claim, a binary choice between capitalism and communism but rather an acknowledgement of the complexity, plurality and ecological and environmental embeddedness of all economic activity to which twenty-first-century economics, and socially and environmentally responsible design, must respond.

Raworth’s vision for *Doughnut Economics* – now a live model and not just a book⁸ – draws inspiration from architect and systems theorist Buckminster Fuller’s observation that:

You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete (Fuller quoted in Raworth 2017 :4).

In the endeavour to make the existing model (or paradigm) obsolete, degrowth and post-growth economists and designers share interests in redrawing the models we use

⁷ *The Limits to Growth* published by environmental scientist, systems thinker Donella Meadows et al. in 1972, accurately predict many of the economic and environmental consequences of unlimited growth we are now experiencing. Ecological economist Herman Daly – author of *Towards a Steady-State Economy* published in 1973 – argued for economics to recognise the ecological boundaries within which all economies are embedded. In *Small is Beautiful*, also published in 1973, economist Ernst Schumacher advocated for economics understood on a human scale.

⁸ Doughnut Economics Action Lab <https://doughnuteconomics.org/> includes tools for use by businesses and municipalities. The city governments of Amsterdam, Brussels and Melbourne are all starting to use doughnut economics to inform planning and policy making.

to inspire our thinking and to visualise, synthesise, enact and articulate alternative possibilities. From a design perspective, accepting the need for paradigmatic change opens up creative space to think about how the current dominant fashion system might be otherwise and where inspiration for change might be sought. For me, this includes exploring experiences of home sewing for what these practices – once more common and now popular again – might tell us that is useful in rethinking relationships with clothes and designing alternative fashion futures.

Materiality and New Materialism

The flat-pack cut-and-sew kits that I designed for sewing beginners before embarking on this PhD study (see Section 1.5) were partly inspired by the suggestion to buy nothing new unless you learn something from it, which I had drawn from a manifesto for *The New Materialism* (Simms & Potts 2012). The kits, which were a material response to this provocation, encapsulated the idea of ‘distributed competence’ (Dant 2006, Watson & Shove 2008) in that some of the competence to make the garment was designed into the printed fabric. The kits met the aim of making it easier for beginner sewists to make a wearable garment on a first attempt. However, they were not, I felt, a sufficient response to the sustainability concerns outlined above. The challenge of sustainability draws attention to the interdependency of human and non-human life (Fletcher & Tham 2019, Haraway 2016, Puig de la Bellacasa 2017) as well as that of humans on a shared planet. At a fundamental level these interdependencies are material, relating to bodies and biological matter, our physical environment and the material flows that enable and shape our existence (Ingold 2013, Haraway 2016, Coole 2013). In seeking alternative perspectives from which to look at the challenges of sustainability, greater attentiveness to materials and our own materiality would appear to be a useful starting point. This line of thinking about materiality – the idea that what we do with matter matters (Haraway 2016, Harper 2018) – has drawn me to a more in-depth literature about ‘new materialism’ than the manifesto where I first encountered the term.

New materialism – perhaps better thought of as new materialisms plural (Coole and Frost 2010) – is more a locus of multiple, developing lines of thinking than it is a school

of thought. There is debate about ‘what is new in new materialism?’ and indeed whether it is new at all (ibid.) or rather, as Smelik suggests, ‘a *renewing* of older traditions’ (2018: 36). Inherently cross-disciplinary, new materialism draws in thinking from across traditional boundaries of science, humanities and the arts and thinkers from different, sometimes contradictory, theoretical perspectives (Coole & Frost 2010, Barrett & Bolt 2013). This cross-disciplinarity presents some definitional challenges, which some might argue undermines new materialism’s usefulness. Firstly, the words ‘matter’, ‘material’, ‘materiality’ and ‘materialism’ appear to have different (but not entirely unrelated) meanings in different academic disciplines as well as in everyday language (see Appendix 1). Secondly, the meaning of ‘agency’ and to whom or what it can be ascribed is a point of contention. Some, as Diane Coole (2013) notes, believe ‘agency’ to be a human capacity linked to choice and intentionality, others, including Jane Bennet (2010), see matter itself as agentic. I prefer Coole’s middle way of recognising that ‘agentic capacities are diffuse across many different types of material entity’ (Coole 2013: 457). This view acknowledges the extent to which material things – including articles of clothing (Woodward 2007) – circumscribe and may facilitate or thwart our intentions. As Fisher and Woodward put it: ‘Objects are part of the generation and actualization of the agency of people, and, through their materiality, can carry or thwart people’s agency’ (2014: 8). Viewed in this way, the agentic capacities of designed things (objects, resources, physical and digital environments) are the embodiment of the practices and wider systems that give rise to them. These designed things also circumscribe and may facilitate or undermine our intentions – or, as Fry would have it, these designed things ‘go on designing’ (2009:3) as they shape the world we live in and impact on how and even whether we might live in it.

Despite these complexities, cross-boundary thinking makes materiality and the possibilities of new materialism(s) interesting and potentially useful, particularly in a textile and clothing context (Smelik 2018, 2022). In broad terms new materialism combines overlapping spheres of thinking about the nature of matter and materialisation; the significance of unpredictability and complexity in human and non-human systems; and a critique and reappraisal of earlier theoretical perspectives, which either overlooked or diminished matter in search for higher (spiritual or

intellectual) meaning or took a reductive approach to matter and materiality in pursuit of unified theories (Coole 2013). Perhaps the most consistent position within new materialism is its ‘refusal of dualisms’ – including subject/object, human/non-human, mind/body (Coole 2013: 454). The separation of mind and body, commonly referred to as the Cartesian dichotomy, is one that has been long disputed by craft practitioners, feminist philosophers and academics alike (see Section 3.2).

Arguing for a reappraisal of materialism, Coole and Frost suggest:

This means returning to the most fundamental questions about the nature of matter and the place of embodied humans within a material world; it means taking heed of development in the natural sciences as well as attending to transformations in the ways we currently produce, reproduce and consume our material environment (2010: 3).

For me, the materialism in new materialism links the materiality of clothes and the material consequences of fashion with the social justice issues at the heart of the fashion industry – both in the materialisation (production) of garments and the materialities of garment workers’ lives. I find thinking these things together – considering how flows of ever-changing stuff change us and the planet – is helpful in rethinking our relationship with the material world and with each other on route to a sustainable and decolonised future for humanity on earth. I will return to issues of materiality and new materialism in Chapters 8 and 9.

2.3 Visible hands

If we accept the need for change, based on the understanding we now have of human-induced climate change and its impacts, we must look beyond current assumptions to alternative ways of being. In the sections above I have given a brief illustration of the social and environmental issues entwined with the economic logic of our current paradigm and some of the tensions within it in relation to fashion. One way to change our perspective and invite more creative thinking in response to issues of sustainability is to approach the problem from entirely different angles. Instead of accepting the

current paradigm of economic growth logic with its implicit and highly contested 'invisible hand', what if we start by making hands more visible? What happens if we look more closely at those things that economists have tended to overlook or undervalue? This would include work traditionally done by women, activities that take place in the domestic sphere and very many things, including care, that are undeniably of value, critical to human survival and flourishing but hard, if not impossible, to quantify meaningfully in monetary terms.

CHAPTER 3 – FASHION SUSTAINABILITY, CRAFT & CLOTHES SEWING

Having introduced the overarching context within which the analysis and conclusions of this research are framed, I will now introduce literature in five thematic areas that have informed how the study was conducted and the findings interpreted. Fashion Sustainability will further introduce the perspectives in the field to which this thesis aims to contribute. I will then address the themes of Craft and the Amateur Textile Craft Revival, introducing concepts and debates that are pertinent to the study of home sewing in its contemporary cultural context. Next, I will address Clothes Sewing specifically, introducing the limited literature relating to the practice of sewing clothes with a machine. In the final section I will introduce theory relating to relationships with clothes, which is useful in furthering the understanding of clothes made at home.

3.1 Fashion sustainability

What's going on?

The approach taken to fashion sustainability in this thesis builds on the overarching context set out in Chapter 2 and a reading of fashion and sustainability literature which acknowledges and seeks to respond to that context. A recurring theme within this literature is the argument that fashion as we know it is unsustainable. In the editorial to the Special Issue of *Fashion Practice* arising from a 2018 conference that marked ten years of the Centre for Sustainable Fashion at the University of the Arts London, Sandy Black asserts that where:

some planetary boundaries have already been transgressed, there is an urgent moral imperative for action beyond mitigation to be accelerated across all industrial sectors, not least the fashion industry (2019: 275).

There is a growing sense of exasperation about the relative lack of progress made on fashion sustainability despite these issues being recognised at least since the early 1990s when, for example, Lynda Grose led the design of Esprit's *ecollection* (Twigger Holroyd et al. 2023). In their contributions to the same special issue others, who, like Black, have been working in the field for decades, discuss how fashion has reached its

current point and how it might possibly be transformed (Grose 2019, Williams 2019, Clark 2019, von Busch 2019). In these articles there is recognition of the fashion industry's aptitude for neutralising critique by appropriating the language and aesthetics of sustainability without making real change (Grose 2019, Clark 2019). As Alice Payne expresses it, the fashion industry has 'near totalising power to subvert resistance' (2021a). The outcomes of critical design projects, alternative fashion subcultures and even Extinction Rebellion protest images show up on WGSN as moodboard inspiration for yet more clothes (Payne 2021a, Horton & Payne 2019). In this way, the dominant unsustainable fashion system, with its roots in the European Enlightenment (see Section 2.2), displays the 'resilience of its own dysfunction' and continues to have a disproportionate influence and impact around the world (Payne 2021a). A priority for research, as I see it, is to explore from where, beyond the fashion industry itself, momentum for sustainable change in fashion may come.

Taming and rewilding

Discussion of the urgent need for change in the way we make and use clothes, expressed above and outlined in Chapter 2, has revealed divergent views about the kind of changes that are necessary and the practices and design strategies that might contribute. Building on Fletcher's earlier distinction between technocentric and ecocentric responses to the challenge of sustainable fashion (2013), Alice Payne helpfully articulates this divergence of views using the terminology of 'taming' and 'rewilding' (Payne 2019, 2021a, 2021b). In this formulation, taming relates to the cleaning up of the existing fashion system and rewilding relates to wider cultural change. Taming largely equates to technological innovation (e.g. bio-materials, recycling technology, greater transparency) and aligns with ideas of green growth and the circular economy, with the aim of decoupling economic growth from the use of resources (Payne 2021a). In contrast, rewilding draws on the potential of a wider range of social and cultural practices to 'loosen corporate control' of the fashion system (ibid.). Taking a more technologically cautious approach, rewilding aligns with ideas of degrowth and post-growth (introduced in Section 2.2), addressing cultures of production and consumption, such that the demand for resources is reduced (ibid.).

While taming allows for technological advancement without more systemic change to the dominant fashion system, rewilding takes a more critical view of the system's wider dysfunctions, relating to coloniality and social justice as well as ecological and environmental harms (ibid.).

While Payne concludes that the philosophies behind taming and rewilding differ too greatly to be synthesised, she suggests that meaningful action may stem from 'a synthesis of the *actions* that each position privileges' (Payne 2019: 14, original emphasis). Payne uses the lenses of 'fashion as culture', 'fashion as industry' and 'fashion as change' to elaborate on the possibilities of taming and rewilding (2019, 2021a, 2021b). In doing so, she uses de Certeau's distinction between 'strategies' and 'tactics' to emphasise different kinds of action that might be taken – strategies being linked to the workings of institutional power enacted from above and tactics being enacted from wherever one sits in the absence of such power (Payne 2021a, 2021b). Acknowledging the scale of fashion's sustainability challenge and warning against utopianism (whether technocentric or ecocentric), Payne suggests that tactics of *all* kinds – multiple 'stabs in the dark' rather than clearly pre-defined solutions – will be required (2021a). Others whose work revolves around issues of decoloniality and climate change arrive at similar conclusions (Machado de Oliveira 2021, Hine 2023). My interest is in the role that amateur clothes sewing might play as a tactic in rewilding fashion.

Craft, production and women's wisdom

Literature on fashion and consumption has been criticised in the past for failing to bring perspectives on production and consumption together (McRobbie 1997, Entwistle 2015). Briggs suggests that where production is studied it tends to focus on process (e.g. design, innovation, technology) rather than people, so the 'culture of production remains largely unexamined' (2013: 188). Where alternative models for the production and consumption of clothing are addressed, it is often from a 'fashion as industry' perspective (e.g. Niinimäki & Hassi 2011, Lang et al. 2016, Freudenreich & Schaltegger 2020), emphasising design strategies (e.g. personalisation, co-design) and services (e.g. rent, repair). The predisposition of different consumer groups to various

strategies have been studied (Gwodz et.al. 2017) and the impact of such strategies on the prolonged use of clothing analysed (Maldini et.al. 2019). However, the users of clothes in these examples are primarily framed as consumers, and the physical production of garments remains largely unseen. An exception is literature relating to clothing repair, which spans both repair as a commercial service and repair as an activity involving users' hands-on engagement in mending their own clothes. In the latter case, where 'user' engagement with textile craft skills is greater, motivations and disinclinations towards mending are examined (Gwilt 2014, Durrani 2018, Diddi & Yan 2019) and questions are raised about who participates. While the popularity of certain types of mending (e.g. sashiko and boro techniques) make mending more visible as a cultural practice, the aesthetics of repair can also be seen designed into mass-produced clothing where workshops double up as promotional tools for brands keen to emphasise their 'slow fashion' credentials (e.g. Toast⁹). This is an example of 'fashion as culture' and 'fashion as industry' intersecting (Payne 2019, 2021a, 2021b). Textile craft skills and the aesthetics they give rise to are, simultaneously, appropriated by an industry otherwise unchanged; employed as a taming 'slow fashion' strategy; and adopted as acts of care by individuals (Horton & Payne 2019).

In her analysis of the possibilities of 'slow + fashion' in 2008, Hazel Clark identified local, traditional and transparent production techniques and greater engagement with material and sensorial qualities of clothing (all relatable to craft practices) as reasons for optimism. As Fletcher (2010) points out, parts of the fashion industry have adopted the word 'slow' as a descriptor for certain types of product – durable, classic, seasonless (and often expensive) – to indicate the opposite of 'fast' fashion. As Fletcher argues, while such products have their place in slow culture, they have been labelled as such without understanding 'slow' (as originating from the slow food movement) in its more ontological sense - as 'a blatant discontinuity with the practices of today' (Fletcher 2010: 262). A decade on, Clark (2019), like Fletcher and Tham (2019), finds fashion's economic context at fault for insufficient action on sustainability. Elaborating on her earlier paper, Clark emphasises the significance of

⁹ <https://www.toa.st/pages/toast-repair>

what she chooses to call ‘women’s wisdom’ as a central factor in ‘slow + fashion’ as meaningful change.

Having chosen to use the term ‘women’s wisdom’ in place of ‘feminism’ to avoid the weeds of definitional differences, Clark explains her purpose in focusing on the work of women thinkers and designers:

to draw from and value the long-established existence of beliefs and methods common to women that can also pre-date and transcend capitalism, modernity, and Eurocentricity, and which are not formed on the basis of patriarchy. (2019: 310)

Reappraising her earlier themes in light of this insight, Clark focuses on locale, mindfulness and sensoriality as principles from which to move forward with ‘a new critical slow + fashion discourse and practice’ (2019: 319). The situated, mindful and sensorial aspects of craft and their connection to the wisdom of women inform my thinking as I consider the potential of amateur sewing as a rewilding tactic. In this context – which, following McRobbie (1997), I am comfortable to call feminist – I see clothes sewing as a culturally feminised skill which has been performed predominantly by women in a multitude of ways for centuries: predating, coexisting with, and also very much entangled with capitalism, modernity and Eurocentric ways of life. My research examines experiences of learning to sew with this entanglement in mind.

Craft practices as rewilding tactics

Returning to Payne, ‘making, mending, repairing, hacking of existing clothing’ are identified as rewilding actions (2019: 14). These actions, which require the application of some craft skill, are amongst those highlighted by Fletcher (2016) as being forced to the margins by a dominant fashion system predicated on newness and mass-production. Fletcher’s argument casts the wearers of clothes as ‘users’ rather than ‘consumers’. In turn, the application of clothes-related practices reliant on craft skills positions the users of clothes also as producers, to some extent. By constructing, altering, embellishing or adapting garments, people take the appearance and

materiality of their clothes into their own hands. I am interested in what people's experiences of engaging directly in the production of their clothing can tell us that could be useful in deepening our understanding of fashion sustainability issues. I am also interested in where amateur clothes sewing as a 'tactic' might intersect with other strategies for sustainability such as 'design for ethical production' and 'design based on producers' skills and capabilities' (Payne 2021a).

Both von Busch and Twigger Holroyd are cited by Payne (2019) as pioneers in fashion hacktivist/activism, who position participatory craft practices as catalysts for change. The term 'hacktivism', in von Busch's case, combines the subversive creativity of hacking (commonly associated with computer code) with ideas of fashion activism. In this context, the sewing machine is positioned as an 'instrument for everyday liberation' (von Busch 2009: 184), enabling the reconfiguration of garments according to 'cookbooks' developed by the designer (von Busch 2008). Similarly, Twigger Holroyd develops a spectrum of knitting 'treatments' that can be used by amateurs to alter and embellish knitwear in a variety of ways (2013). Twigger Holroyd uses this participatory research-through-design approach to explore the idea of 'openness' in fashion, making connections between the culture of open-source information, the opening up and refashioning of garments, the opening up of creative design possibilities to amateurs and the opening up of the fashion system more broadly (2013, 2017a, 2017b). This open fashion system is conceptualised by Twigger Holroyd as a commons, of which 'folk fashion' – fashion that derives from the making and wearing of clothes that have been produced (in some way) by people for themselves or others close to them (2017b) – is a part. Twigger Holroyd's conceptualisation of fashion as a commons incorporates both a land-based metaphor – relating to common land prior to enclosure and private ownership – and an activist understanding of commons as collaborative spaces. As such, Twigger Holroyd's fashion commons is resistant to 'enclosure' by the fashion industry and open to all to influence, engage with and participate in (2013, 2017b). The participatory research of both von Busch and Twigger Holroyd invites people with some pre-existing level of craft skill (in sewing and knitting respectively) to participate in the alteration of pre-existing garments, based on options

for which instructions are provided. In contrast, the research that follows focuses on how people acquire craft skill, specifically sewing skills, in the first place.

Both von Busch and Twigger Holroyd have subsequently developed their work in ways that I have found helpful to my research. Otto von Busch has shifted his focus from fashion ‘hactivism’ to address the power dynamics within fashion (2019) and the *Psychopolitics of Fashion* (2020). In this latter publication, von Busch shares a creative exploration of how the fashion industry and an increasingly diffuse array of other fashion influencers dictate fashion and affect how people in turn ‘police’ each other in what is worn. Reflecting on his earlier work, von Busch questions the limitations of participatory ‘hactivism’ as a form of fashion agency:

Such focus on capabilities may create worthy skills and user agency beyond the narrow means of consumption. But hacking an operating system, even a cultural, social or economic operating system, always risks preserving the norm for what is a worthy ability within the current value system or environment. Too often, designers model the agency people ‘should’ have (or want to have) from their own experiences, without asking people what they actually prefer, or setting such agency in a socio-economic or cultural context. What could be an educational opportunity can easily turn into paternalism. (2019: 306)

To me this indicates the importance of finding out how people experience something before making assumptions about what people ‘should’ want and what can (or cannot) be changed. As von Busch suggests, engaging in fashion ‘hactivism’ might be a tactic that enhances skills and agency for those willing and able to engage with it, within the context of a fashion system otherwise unchallenged and unchanged. This observation influenced the approach taken in this research. I have sought to develop an understanding of beginners’ experiences of learning clothes sewing skills within their own home contexts to inform consideration of how ‘fashion as culture’, and home sewing as an aspect of that culture, might be otherwise. In doing so I avoid making premature assumptions based on my own experience: sewing skills will be learnt by today’s sewing beginners in different ways and in different contexts to me. Before

making any assumptions about the value or appeal of home sewing as a tactic in response to the challenge of fashion sustainability, it is important to understand what currently attracts people to sewing, how they learn sewing skills and what they hope to do with these skills once they have them.

Building on her idea about openness and plurality within the fashion commons, Twigger Holroyd has subsequently developed the Fashion Fictions project. Fashion Fictions presents an open invitation to people to engage in the writing of fictional fashion worlds to stimulate the imagination and enactment of alternatives to our current fashion system. By framing this world-building activity within a parallel present, as opposed to a fictional future, the project encourages exploration of ideas that, however unlikely, are technically possible in our current world (Howell et. al 2021). In its playful approach, the project creates a safe space for people to reveal ways in which they might like fashion to be otherwise. Textile craft skills, often inspired by past practices, recur as themes within the fictions, prototypes and enactments generated through the project, perhaps indicating the latent pleasures of material engagement and craft agency as appreciated or unrealised desires.

3.2 Craft

Twigger Holroyd and von Busch have explored textile craft skills in ‘amateur’ hands for their potential to stimulate change in mindsets. This research looks closely at the learning of clothes sewing skills, to consider the role these skills might play as tactics in the rewilding of fashion (Payne 2019, 2021a, 2021b), given that interest in learning to sew clothes has been on the increase in recent years (see Sections 3.3 and 3.4). Before expanding on literature addressing amateur textile craft practices in general and amateur clothes sewing specifically, I will introduce some aspects of craft theory that have informed my research.

Craft theory

Much craft theory derives from the observation and theorisation of professional studio crafts, with amateur craft traditionally receiving less academic attention (Jackson 2010, Niedderer and Townsend 2014). Within this craft literature, craft has often been

juxtaposed to industrial production and/or contrasted with the fields of art or design. Indeed, as Glenn Adamson identifies, it is in the distinction from mass production that the modern concept of 'craft' emerged. Before the Industrial Revolution, Adamson argues, craft was just part of life (2013). Yet examination of the status and meaning of craft, as it adapted and evolved in response to technological advancements throughout the twentieth century, reveals the relationship between craft and industrial production to be constantly changing and less binary than it may once have seemed (Dormer 1997a, Adamson 2010a, Frayling 2011). Moving into the twenty-first century, definitional debates arising from the struggle for professional craft to gain parity of esteem with other creative disciplines in industrial and now post-industrial societies have continued to obscure the entanglement of craft with everyday life, as Adamson observes:

Describing craft as an art form, or even as a fixed set of disciplines, disguises the otherwise obvious fact that craft is involved in an enormous range of cultural practices that have nothing to do with aesthetics or museums. It also blinds us to the potential radicality of craft's non-art status. (Adamson 2010a: 2).

Contemporary craft studies, which engage more with amateur craft and craftivism (craft as a form of activism) as well as professional crafts, seem less concerned with definitional issues and consequently better able to articulate and critique the political potential of craft in the twenty-first century (Black & Burisch 2021). I will expand on the politics of amateur textile craft in the next section but first I will introduce two concepts from craft literature that are useful to this research. The first is Pye's differentiation between the 'workmanship of risk' and the 'workmanship of certainty', which hinges on the extent to which the material outcomes of craft or mass-production are 'predetermined' or dependent on 'judgement, dexterity and care' (Pye 2010: 342). Given the relative lack of automation in the mass-production of clothing (noted in Section 1.3), this distinction is an interesting one to consider in relation to the making of clothes. It is one I will return to briefly in Section 9.4. The second concept, which will be discussed in more detail below, is tacit knowledge.

Tacit and embodied knowledge

The concept of personal or tacit knowledge originates with chemist and philosopher of science Michael Polanyi (1958, 1966). In its simplest terms, from a craft practitioner's perspective, tacit knowledge can be understood as that which is known by the practitioner '*from the body*' through the practice of a craft (O'Connor 2017: 217, emphasis added). The term 'tacit knowledge' is often used interchangeably with 'embodied knowledge' by those, like O'Connor, writing from a craft practice perspective (2005, 2017). Anthropologist Tim Ingold – who draws on insights and practices from across disciplines including archaeology, art and architecture – takes issue with the use of both terms. From his anthropological perspective, Ingold views craft making as an aspect of life rather than a discipline or category of practice. Ingold argues that as sensory beings, our capacity for knowledge is entwined with our physical, sensory, selves and that *all* knowledge is therefore embodied (Ingold 2019, 2013). To view knowledge otherwise, he suggests, is to perpetuate an understanding of human experience that divides body and mind. Ingold responds to Polanyi's suggestion that 'we can know more than we can tell' (Polanyi 1966 cited in Ingold 2013: 109), in two ways. Firstly, he questions what he sees as Polanyi's assumption that to 'tell' is to do so in the written or spoken word. Ingold suggests that there is another sense of 'telling' in what we can tell about making processes from the material objects that result – in their 'inscriptive trace[s]' (2013: 109-10). Secondly, he observes that craft practitioners have a great deal to say about their 'know-how' which might be told, as a story, through practice rather than 'specification'.

Specifications provide information *about* the specified, about the materials to be used, about parts and their dimensions, about movements to be made. They define a project. But stories issue *from* moving bodies and vital materials, in the telling. (2013: 110, original emphasis).

Understood as personal rather than 'tacit', such knowledge cannot be specified or predetermined but might be 'told' in other non-verbal or written ways (Ingold 2013: 10). Far from being 'buried deep down in the psyche' as the term 'tacit' might imply, Ingold suggests that personal unspecified knowledge is ever present in the practice of

craft (and life). It is not what the craft practitioner does without thinking, it *is* thinking with eyes and fingers, as a practiced sewist might (Ingold 2013: 111).

Exploring the development of embodied knowledge based on her experience of learning to blow glass (2005, 2017), O'Connor describes how, as proficiency increases, at some point the sense of self, and even the sense of the tool in use, recedes as 'bodily intentionality' and 'corporeal anticipation' come to the fore (O'Connor 2005: 190 & 201). O'Connor also writes about the 'choreography of materialities' involved in the making process and refers to 'handwork's generative undulations' to describe the interaction between body and material in the forming of an object (O'Connor 2017: 223, 224). This description suggests a relational, even reciprocal relationship between the craft learner and the material.

Both Ingold and O'Connor recognise an anticipatory aspect to craft making. Ingold draws a distinction between predictive and anticipatory foresight, suggesting that '[t]he former might yield a plan, but it is the latter that enables the practitioner to carry on' (2013: 110). For O'Connor:

The anticipation that marks proficient practical knowledge is not a reflective forward-*looking* gesture. It is non-reflective corporeal forward-*going* movement beyond adaptation (O'Connor 2005: 201)

For both, the personal or tacit knowledge that enables and arises from craft practice is reciprocally entwined with the practice of a craft and the becoming of objects. Bodily movement is inscribed in what is made, as the making of the article also shapes the maker. The 'tacit' aspect of craft skill is that outside the specification (Ingold 2013: 110) which is multi-sensory and materially entangled. O'Connor's sense of self and tools receding suggest a dissolving of subject/object boundaries – between maker and what is made. Central to these understandings of what it is to make things is the rejection of the body and mind divide that originates with Descartes (Damasio, 1994/2006); this divide is also rejected by every other craft theorist I have read and, I suggest, every experienced craft practitioner who has given serious thought to their

experience of making. Lambros Malafouris' material engagement theory also posits that the mind is not divisible from the sensory perception of our surroundings (Malafouris 2019). In the making of a pot, Malafouris suggests, the constant interaction between material, sensory perception and response is continual and dynamic (ibid.). Drawing insights from the long history of phenomenological philosophy and contemporary neuroscience, theories of 'embodied cognition' also explore fluid boundaries between mind and environment (Groth 2017).

For research that focuses on learning to make things, specifically clothes in this case, the range of theoretical perspectives pointing to the entanglement of mind and materials provides useful context. The sense of craft knowledge being situated, context specific and materially entwined feels familiar to me through the practice of crafts, including sewing. Full absorption in the experience of making, like that described by O'Connor – also reflected in Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow' (1990) – are what I and others often seek and sometimes find in the practice of craft. Of particular interest in this research is how novices learn tacit or embodied – that is, non-specified – knowledge of sewing. I will turn next to the acquisition of craft knowledge by amateurs, drawing on the work of Nicola Wood alongside that of Ingold and O'Connor.

Bridging the knowledge gap

Wood, like Ingold and O'Connor, draws on the work of Polanyi as well as that of learning theorists Dewey (experiential learning) and Schön (reflective practice) to examine the acquisition of tacit knowledge in craft practices, using bowl turning and clog making (Wood 2006) and later pocket-knife making (Wood et al. 2009) as research cases. Wood builds on Polanyi's idea of 'indwelling' as the process by which tacit knowledge is learnt – 'whereby theory becomes interiorised and only known through its embodiment in action' (Polanyi 1966: 17 paraphrased in Wood 2006: 142-3). It is with this order of things – suggesting, as it does, that theory precedes bodily action – that both Ingold and O'Connor would take issue. In Wood's reading of Polanyi's indwelling, 'the novice seeks to dwell in the actions of the expert through observing them and taking action to imitate them' (Wood et al. 2009: 72). Wood's studies focus

on the design of prototype learning resources for novices, based on the elicitation and interpretation of expert knowledge. These studies highlight how hard it is for novices to learn simply through observation and imitation (for example from video or demonstration alone), *and* how challenging the elicitation and interpretation of expert knowledge can be, especially when some experts are more reticent than others in examining and telling of what they know. The challenge in both cases reflects Ingold's thoughts on what it is to 'tell' – in the sense of *what* you can tell about something and *how* you can tell something. Ingold suggests that 'the telling of stories is an education of attention' and a means for practitioners to 'tell of what they know *without* specifying it' (2013: 110).

As we have seen above, tacit knowledge is that which lies outside specification or 'rules' in a formal sense. O'Connor (2017) credits Dreyfus with drawing a distinction between rules and maxims, identifying that maxims are situated in a way that rules are not: 'A 'maxim' refers to that which the student recognizes from previous experience' (Dreyfus 2004: 177 cited in O'Connor 2017: 228). Having used various methods to elicit and interpret expert knowledge in support of craft learning by novices, Wood concludes that:

The guidance offered by an expert can be seen as a series of 'bridges' that give the novice the opportunity to access the personal knowledge of the expert. The bridges are not necessarily *the* way to undertake the task, but *a* way that the expert feels is helpful to get started (Wood 2006: 145, original emphasis)

Wood goes on to explain that it is through 'feedback from their own actions' that novices can discern which of the bridges are foundational for them and which are 'stepping stones' towards their own mode of practice – which they might interpret as fundamental to the way they work and which they move beyond as they gain a bodily understanding of their own ways of working (Wood 2006: 145). Wood emphasises that the bridges are not the tacit knowledge but a route to developing one's own.

Returning to the subject of this study, the nature of fabric and sewing patterns and the complexity of the garment making process make clothes sewing a craft especially reliant on procedural instructions, particularly for beginners. How home sewists develop the tacit or embodied knowledge of their craft will depend on how sewing skills are practised and taught.

Reflection in and on action

Wood uses Schön's distinction between 'reflection *in* action' and 'reflection *on* action' to examine the exteriorisation and interiorisation of craft knowledge in relation to learning (2006). Although it proves difficult to identify these 'modes of reflection' in novices, Wood observes that those who made most progress in bowl turning appeared to make a shift from reflection *on* to reflection *in* action – that is, from conscious, cognitive, post-hoc reflection on action to improvisatory, 'tacit and spontaneous' reflection in action (Schön 1987 n.p.) – over the course of their learning.

Reflecting on the experience of learning to 'gather' molten glass on the end of the blowpipe in the process of glassblowing, O'Connor notes that 'gathering involves the sensation of heat and the motion of retrieval, each common to my previous experiences of working a campfire and fishing respectively' (2005: 191). This reflection suggest that prior sensory experiences may influence our ability to make use of 'bridges' to develop our own tacit knowledge and become more skilled in a new activity (see also Groth 2017). The ability to learn a new skill, such as sewing, may be dependent on the prior, perhaps seemingly unrelated, experiences we have to bring to it – such as using scissors to cut paper or steering a car.

Whether it is useful to think of reflection in action as a form of reflection at all when it comes to craft practice (as opposed to other practices such as the teaching Schön was concerned with) is open to question. O'Connor is clear from experience that the unfolding of tacit knowledge in practice is explicitly 'non-reflective'. However, the conclusion Wood reaches as a result of bringing Schön into the picture alongside Polanyi to understand processes of craft learning is that:

the terms ‘elicitation’ and ‘transmission’ take on a subtly different meaning from usual, moving away from the connotation that knowledge can be extracted and passed on from one person to the next (Wood 2006; 149)

This observation resonates with the arguments of O’Connor and Ingold. Being situated, context specific, anticipatory and materially entwined, the tacit or personal knowledge of a craft is what enables the craft practitioner to ‘carry on’ (Ingold 2013: 110) and find meaning in their work (O’Connor 2005). Such knowledge cannot be transferred directly to another person. Wood’s bridges and Ingold’s stories are both attempts to guide learners toward what otherwise remains tacit. Both sound similar to the concept of ‘scaffolding’, credited to Vygotsky in pedagogic literature (e.g van de Pol et al. 2010), in that these bridges and stories are what assists the learner in doing what they would otherwise struggle to do alone. On closer reflection, however, the corporeally and materially entwined nature of craft practice highlights how the ‘bridge’ subtly differs from the ‘scaffold’. Rather than simply providing access to an existing edifice of knowledge, the bridge guides us from the outside in. It is what enables us to feel our way through the practice of a craft activity and find our own meaning in it.

As someone with years of experience of sewing, amongst other crafts, the entanglement of the corporeal and the material in the process of making feels familiar to me. The literature relating to tacit and embodied knowledge and the idea of learning resources as ‘bridges’ is useful in examining how people encounter the resources available to them when learning to sew, as explored in the findings Chapters 6-8.

Everyday creativity in the twenty-first century

In the twenty-first century the revival of interest in amateur craft has been closely linked with developments in digital technology. From blogging to social media (Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram and more recently TikTok), the sharing of creative and craft pursuits online has grown rapidly as the internet has evolved, with video increasingly used both as a creative medium in its own right and as a means to relay creative experience and information online. This digitally entwined manifestation

of craft and creativity lies at the heart of David Gauntlett's *Making is Connecting* (2011, 2018). For Gauntlett, creative and collaborative spaces online are part of everyday creativity, as much as the physical making of things. 'Connecting' in this context thus relates to connection between people and ideas, as well as between materials in the making of things.

In contrast to more formal definitions of creativity, which relate to externally judged originality, Gauntlett understands creativity as 'a *feeling* and a *process*' (2011:17) defined as follows:

Everyday creativity refers to a process which brings together at least one active human mind, and the material or digital world, in the activity of making something which is novel *in that context*, and is a process which evokes a feeling of joy. (2011: 76, emphasis added)

This definition of creativity is useful to me as it is this everyday sense of creativity that people who choose to make their own clothes, including the participants in this research, often seek and relate to. As Gauntlett acknowledges, not all parts of the making process need be enjoyable for this definition to have meaning in relation to amateur craft practice.

Making things is often an intense, difficult, or frustrating experience. But whether the thrilling zing comes right at the start, with an exciting idea before any planning, or right at the end, when the thing is finally *done*, it's likely to be there somewhere. (2011:77)

Gauntlett's view of everyday creativity, like Knott's exploration of amateur craft (2015) and Ingold's reflections on making (2013), places emphasis on process rather than outcome. While I embrace Gauntlett's view of creativity, particularly in relation to amateur textile craft practices, I am also mindful of Twigger Holroyd's (2014, 2016) observation that for people seeking to make their own clothes, outcomes can matter very much (see Chapters 6 and 7). I also agree with Gauntlett that it is people *choosing*

to make things (whether physical items or online videos), despite abundant opportunities to simply ‘consume’ professionally produced alternatives, that makes these acts of everyday creativity culturally significant and therefore (potentially) political. As Gauntlett and Twigger Holroyd discuss, it is through multiple small acts of creativity shared that larger scale change seems possible (Gauntlett & Twigger Holroyd 2014). Everyday creativity, at the individual and societal level, can impact the way we see the world.

3.3 Amateur textile craft revival

In this section, I will provide some context for the digitally entwined nature of contemporary amateur craft, including feminist debates surrounding the apparent increased interest in textile crafts and the resurgence of these practices as contemporary ‘fabriculture’ (Bratich & Brush 2011). I will also touch on the relative absence of sewing within this literature and in participatory textile craft research which focuses on aspects of community and well-being through craft.

Digitally entwined textile craft revival

As introduced in the previous section, the resurgence of interest in craft in recent decades has been very much entwined with digital technology. Amateur participation in textile crafts has been greatly amplified online (Gauntlett 2018). The optimistic view of increased digital connectivity reflected in the first edition of Gauntlett’s *Making is Connecting*, published in 2011, has since proved more complicated. Opportunities to connect with others around shared craft interests have increased with the proliferation of social media, individual sewing blogs (Bain 2016), downloadable PDF patterns and websites that combine pattern-user reviews and community forums with the online sale of craft supplies (e.g PatternReview.com). At the same time that the internet’s potential as an ‘open’, creative and democratising force has been realised, less positive social impacts have emerged through use of the same technology. As Gauntlett acknowledges in the book’s second edition, digital surveillance, monopoly power and divisive minority voices have also been amplified online, with negative ‘real world’ consequences (2018). Following the web 2.0 digital revolution, online content and communities relating to knitting and sewing have occasionally become embroiled

in the divisive cultural politics that manifest online – as illustrated in 2019 when the knitting website Ravelry was challenged to address inclusivity issues and set out a stance on anti-racism (Paul 2019, Palmsköld 2021) and Papercut Patterns were challenged on issues of cultural appropriation relating to a pattern that had been named the ‘Kochi Kimono’ (Wahlquist 2019). As Bratich & Brush (2011) identify, contemporary textile craft culture blurs boundaries between public and private spheres, old and new technologies, folk and commercial cultures. I am interested in how the on- and offline aspects of everyday creativity come together for those seeking to make their own clothes. This research focuses on experiences of sewing, where the online sharing of sewing practices and the offline practice of that craft within the home are entwined in a variety of ways.

Like other crafts, clothing-related practices including knitting and sewing have also become more visible offline. The increased popularity of amateur sewing is reflected not only in a mass of online content, but also a proliferation of sewing pattern brands, the emergence of high street sewing cafes and classes and even mainstream TV coverage. Amongst all this activity, textile crafts retain a variety of contested associations: with nostalgic practices of the past, with countercultural movements and activist aims (Bain 2016) as well as with contemporary forms of entrepreneurialism (Black & Burisch 2021). As Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch point out, craft’s popular resurgence has been ‘concurrent with the rise of neoliberal capitalism and a fundamental shift in the way we consume, communicate, live and work’ (2021: 1).

Feminist perspectives on textile craft

In contemporary UK culture, textile crafts are highly gendered. Sewing has long been an activity strongly associated with women and consequently has been a topic for feminist debate, from Wollstonecraft ([1792] 2004) to de Beauvoir ([1949] 2011) and beyond, in each according to their time and positionality. As the debate has developed it has recognised that sewing has played multiple roles in women’s lives, with these roles often diverging along class lines (Burman 1999, Hall & Jayne 2016). For example, Reynolds’ analysis of the UK government’s Make Do and Mend scheme introduced during the Second World War highlights that making and mending was the norm for

working-class women, while those teaching classes were often from middle- and upper-class homes, who had been taught needlework as an accomplishment rather than a practical skill (1999). Consequently, some classes fell short of their aims by focusing on decorative craft skills rather than more practical ones. This ‘make do and mend’ era holds a particularly nostalgic place in British folk memory, still evoked in the ‘keep calm and carry on’ bunting-and-cupcakes aesthetic that has emerged as part of popular craft culture (Dirix 2014). However, as Hall and Jayne (2016) also note, ethics of consumption and textile craft practices during wartime austerity were socially, politically and economically very different to those of today.

Literature addressing the resurgence of amateur textile crafts from various feminist perspectives questions whether renewed interest in these crafts is nostalgic; a critical ‘reclaiming’ of previously denigrated crafts; or a subversive counter to mainstream consumerism (see below). For some, the potential for craft practices to further feminist interests lies in crafts that were once seen as domestic being made more public – whether in physical spaces (e.g ‘Stitch ‘n’ Bitch-style knitting groups) or through public sharing online (Minahan & Wolfram Cox 2007, Pentney 2008, Orton-Johnson 2014). In this ‘making public’, some see potential to subvert gender norms, by making it more apparent that women are not the only people participating in textile crafts (Pentney 2008, Kelly 2014). Groenveld highlights the joyful, celebratory and sometimes ironic performance of normative femininity in contemporary fabriculture, expressed in third-wave feminist magazines as a form of empowerment (Groenveld 2010). Others suggest that any progressive intent in such activity might easily be misinterpreted and undermined, especially where sharing takes place in relatively depoliticised or increasingly commercialised spaces (Dawkins 2011, Solomon 2013, Kelly 2014). Jessica Bain (2016) highlights that despite third-wave feminists’ rejection of any conflicts between normative femininity and feminist values, tensions between textile craft practices and various feminist perspectives continue to be discussed. Bain’s critical discourse analysis of popular sewing blogs finds evidence of both explicit and implicit feminist politics within them. However, she cautions against any assumption that sewing as a craft is ‘implicitly feminist’ when many sewists would not identify as such or may be explicitly anti-feminist (2016: 65).

Narratives around the ‘reclaiming’ of crafts, associated with third-wave feminism, raise the question of who these crafts are being reclaimed from (Bratich & Brush 2011). Some note a tendency within the reclaiming narratives to disidentify with previous generations of crafters *and/or* feminists (Brunsdon 2005), while blind spots in relation to issues of class and race are retained (Dawkins 2011) and privileges resulting from the activism of previous generations go unrecognised (Groenveld 2010, Bratich & Brush 2011). While some second-wave feminists undoubtedly rejected domestic activities, such as sewing, as being in ‘opposition to gender equality goals and the struggle for equal status and recognition in the public sphere’, this was just one stance (Bain 2016: 59). Historically, feminists in both the first and second waves have sought to challenge the devaluation of domestic activities, including textile crafts (Groenveld 2010). For example, Rozsika Parker argues that the textile banners of suffragists and peace campaigners at Greenham Common are evidence of previous generations’ attempts, firstly, to portray femininity as strength, and secondly, to position protest messages as hailing from protesters’ standpoint ‘*as women*’ (Parker [1984] 2010: 211, original emphasis). Parker and others also emphasise that the patriarchal structures that designated textile and other crafts as feminine, domestic and unimportant in the first place also served to obscure the social relationships amongst women that are entwined with these practices (Groenveld 2010, Parker [1984] 2010). Bratich and Brush (2011) suggest that the feminist potential in the resurgence of domestic crafts may lie in the possibility of misremembered pasts being re-evaluated through craft practices, with connections, rather than divisions, between generations being realised. Like Bratich and Brush (*ibid.*), as a feminist and a sewist, I have more sympathy with arguments for reclaiming domestic textile crafts from patriarchal and capitalist world-orderings than from a previous generation of supposedly ‘censorious feminists’ (Brunsdon 2005: 113).

Textile crafts, community and well-being

Although amateur textile crafts have received greater academic attention in recent years (see Shercliff & Twigger Holroyd 2020) there is relatively little academic research addressing the sewing of clothes by machine compared with other textile crafts (Bain

2016). There may be a number of reasons for this. For example, where amateur textile crafts are the subject of academic research, the emphasis of that research is often on community and well-being or cultural heritage aspects of craft, rather than the learning of craft skills per se. Where practical workshops form part of this research, the discussion that takes place around the craft activity is often more important as research data than the outcomes of the making activity. The noise of sewing machines can prohibit conversation, in comparison with other textile crafts such as hand knitting, embroidery, patchwork and mending. Furthermore, as Hall and Jayne (2016) note, the range of processes involved in clothes sewing requires ‘a particular kind of space’ (ibid: 220). Beyond these practical considerations, it seems likely that the perceived importance of sewing as a subject for study remains a factor, as McRobbie (1997) and Buckley (1999) identified a quarter century ago – McRobbie highlighting the inattention to production in feminist literature relating to consumption and Buckley identifying women designing and sewing clothes at home as ‘largely invisible in history’ (1999: 56).

3.4 Clothes sewing

As noted above, there is limited literature addressing the sewing of cloth into clothes. Much of the literature that touches on clothes-sewing practices comes from a historical perspective, with Barbara Burman’s *Culture of Sewing* (1999) remaining a key source. Jennifer Grayer-Moore’s *Pattern Making History & Theory* (2020) also provides some interesting historical and contemporary insights, while Bain (2016), Hall & Jayne (2016), Martindale (2017, 2020) and Clarke (2020) contribute useful perspectives on contemporary sewing practices. The vast majority of what has been written, unsurprisingly, focuses on the experiences of women. The experiences of people from different backgrounds vis-à-vis race and class are also inconsistently addressed and these limitations are reflected in what follows. In this section, I will highlight what the available literature tells us about participation in home sewing, motivations for sewing clothes and the context within which sewing is learnt and practised in the UK today. In the interests of brevity, ‘sewing’ is used to refer to the practice of making sewn clothes.

Participation in home sewing

The popularity of home sewing is seemingly increasing. Many people, including young men, are reported to be taking up sewing, including as a new hobby during the recent pandemic (Wood 2017, 2020; Elan 2021). Where data is available regarding the practice of textile skills within the home, it is hard to disentangle different practices (e.g. knitting, dressmaking, patchwork, embroidery, mending). The last time the UK General Household Survey collected relevant data was in 1997: 36% of women reported having engaged in dressmaking, needlework or knitting in four weeks prior to the survey (Office for National Statistics 1997). After 1997, accurate figures are hard to find. Martindale and McKinney suggest that as many as 5% of the UK population ‘sew garments for themselves’ (2020: 33). This proportion, based on Craft & Hobby Trade Association figures reported in a newspaper article from 2014 (Lewis-Hammond 2014) includes people engaging in sewing activities other than making new clothes from start to finish (e.g. mending, altering). A more recent newspaper article, also citing Craft & Hobby Trade Association (CHA-UK) figures, suggests that ‘7.7m now count running up their own clothes as a hobby’, including ‘more than 1 million people – almost all women – [who] have taken up sewing in the last three years’ (Wood 2017). The figure of 7.7 million represents over 11% of the UK population or – accounting for the significant gender imbalance in sewing – somewhere nearing 1 in 5 women. This proportion as it is reported in this article appears artificially high, and almost certainly includes sewing activities other than making of clothes from scratch.¹⁰ However, Hobbycraft sales figures for sewing patterns and sewing machines reported in the same article also indicate increased interest in sewing even before the surge in sewing activity noted during the pandemic (see Section 1.6).

While it appears that interest in sewing in the UK and the US continues to grow (Martindale 2020), there is little in academic literature to tell us where and how people are learning sewing skills today. Addie Martindale’s 2017 thesis – based on interviews with 15 ethnically diverse, middle-class, US-based women aged 20-40 –

¹⁰ That is, the process of making a sewn item of clothing from the cutting out of fabric through to the completed construction of a finished garment.

provides some insights. Many of Martindale’s interviewees had been exposed to some sewing practices within the home as children and/or spoke of relatives who sewed, However, few of these women learnt to sew at home as children. Almost all the interviewees had learnt some sewing skills in ‘home economics’ at school but did not necessarily enjoy the experience or link it to their interest in sewing as an adult. Some (but not all) of the women in the study had taken classes when first learning to sew before continuing their learning, predominantly at home using online resources.

Motivations for sewing

Much of what has been written about experiences and motivations for sewing is covered in consumption literature from the US: Sherry Schofield-Tomschin (1999) and more recently Martindale (2017). Schofield-Tomschin’s (1999) review of US studies from the twentieth century identifies shifting motivations for sewing over time. The term ‘economy’ – used in this context to mean frugality – is reported to be the main motivation for sewing before the Second World War, especially for those on lower incomes. Creativity, quality and fit became stronger motivating factors for sewing, in addition to economy, during the 1960s. Economic motivations declined during the 1970s and by the mid-1980s sewing was found to no longer be cheaper than ready-made clothing, when time is taken into account (Loker 1985 cited in Schofield-Tomschin 1999). By the 1980s sewing was identified largely as a leisure activity, more popular in middle and upper income households (Kean & Levin 1989, Schofield-Tomschin 1999). Schofield-Tomschin reports that her own study from 1994 finds psychological and physiological reasons for sewing – such as sense of accomplishment, being creative, and feelings of self-confidence or self-reliance – to be dominant, with motivations of economy and fit ranking lower down the list. Quality, as a motivating factor, is expressed both in terms of value for money and construction quality in comparison with ready-to-wear garments. Those who sew are reported to consider it a therapeutic and relaxing activity (Schofield-Tomschin 1999).

Addie Martindale’s more recent study identifies personal fulfilment as the core motivation for sewing (2017). Around this core motivation, Martindale weaves three interconnected themes of investment (of cognitive effort, time, money), control (over

appearance, clothing selection and the choice to make or buy clothes) and empowerment (linked to increasing confidence in appearance and skills). Experiences linked to each of these themes are seen to contribute to the personal fulfilment derived from sewing as well as ongoing motivation to do so. The online aspect of learning and connecting is found to be particularly significant for Martindale’s interviewees, who were recruited to the study via sewing-related Facebook groups. All were active participants in these groups, which they used to learn and problem solve with the help of others. The approval, validation and support of others in the sewing community is linked to increased self-esteem and the desire to sew. Bain (2016) and Clarke (2020) similarly highlight community connections as important for sewists in their respective studies – referencing supportive online communities (Bain 2016) and, interestingly, feelings of connectedness to previous generations of women (Clarke 2020). Both authors also find body non-conformity (i.e. having bodily proportions outside standardised sizing schemas or the idealised feminine form) to be a motivating factor for contemporary sewists (see also Relationships with Clothes, below).

Learning to sew within and outside the home

As seen above, research identifies changing motivations for sewing over the latter half of the twentieth century, away from practical need and towards those of personal fulfilment. The ways in which sewing knowledge and skill have been learnt over this time have also changed. Historically, it might be assumed that that sewing skills, like other textile crafts, have traditionally been passed on within the home between generations of women. While this is part of the picture – although to a different extent for women in different social and cultural contexts – sewing skills used at home were also learnt in the context of domestic service, apprenticeships or factory work (Buckley 1999, Hackney 1999, Moseley 2001).

During the Second World War the UK government’s Make Do and Mend scheme promoted the learning of practical sewing skills to all women (Reynolds 1999). The value of the scheme in terms of the kind of skills taught and the degree to which they contributed to limiting textile demand compared with other measures is contested (Reynolds 1999, Bide 2022 cited in Twigger Holroyd 2023). Grayer-Moore’s (2020)

analysis of some of the instructional materials presented at the time suggests that fairly considerable prior knowledge would have been required to complete some of tasks successfully using the limited instructions provided: for example, cutting a commercial blouse pattern from the fabric of a deconstructed men's shirt or taking a pattern from the sleeve of an existing garment. Grayer-Moore also highlights the role of department stores and companies such as Singer in offering classes and advice. This support was offered, Grayer-Moore (ibid.) notes, at nominal cost in the hope, presumably, of increased sales of sewing patterns and equipment.

Towards the end of the Second World War, the importance placed on girls learning some practical needlework skills was reflected in the Education Act of 1944 – such that 'all girls in state schools were required to do some needlework' (Reynolds 1999: 337). Dressmaking and the skills to make do and mend were included in the General Certificate of Education (GCE) and Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) qualifications introduced in the 1950s and in 1964 respectively (ibid.). There is evidence that home clothes sewing remained a common practice in the UK and US after the Second World War (Reynolds 1999, Schofield-Tomschin 1999, Spanabel Emery 2014, 2020). Oral histories give us some snapshots of women using skills learnt in service (Buckley 1999) or factory settings to make their own clothes at home (Moseley 2001) continuing into the 1950s and 1960s. Similarly, Carol Tulloch's style narratives provide insight into sewing skills learnt in school and at home in Jamaica, valued for their role in the expression of identity and community connection when transferred to a UK context in the same period (1999). The snapshots offered by these studies provide rich detail about the styles of clothes these women made and the role of those clothes in the women's lives as a means of provisioning, self-expression and identity formation (see Section 3.5 below). However, only limited detail is revealed about *how* these sewing skills were learnt.

It is difficult to establish how, and to whom, sewing skills were taught in UK schools since the 1960s. By the time I went to a state secondary school in 1980 the gender separation in the teaching of practical craft skills, including needlework, had diminished. At some point leading up to the introduction of the UK National

Curriculum in 1989, the language of ‘domestic science’ (or ‘home economics’) and ‘needlework’ seems to have shifted, towards that of ‘design & technology’ and ‘textiles’. This shift suggests a repositioning of textile-related knowledge away from practical domestic skills and towards design and industry, which reflects changing educational priorities in response to the social and economic context of the time. Kean and Levin (1989) link the decline in sewing being taught in US high schools to changing perceptions of home sewing and more women entering the workplace during the 1980s. It seems likely, given the similar cultural context, that teaching of sewing declined in UK schools for similar reasons. Today, while textiles remains part of the Design and Technology curriculum, any part that sewing plays in this is highly dependent on the skills of teachers, many of whom are not textile specialists. According to one teacher who taught textiles in a state secondary school until recently (personal communication 2020), textile teaching ‘dropped off a cliff’ in 2010, as priority was given to STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths) and the introduction of the EBacc¹¹.

Sewing resources

The resources available to support the sewing of clothes at home have changed over time and present some insight into changing experiences of learning to sew clothes. Women’s magazines, in which dressmaking was a prominent feature, flourished in the early twentieth century along with the printed paper patterns that many of them had a role in distributing (Spanabel Emery 1999, 2020, Burman 1999, Hackney 1999). These magazines and the promotion of sewing patterns made a particular virtue of offering the latest styles to home sewists (Spanabel Emery 1999). Joy Spanabel Emery tells us that that paper pattern sales continued to thrive in the 1960s but that pattern companies started to struggle and were forced to adapt to changing demands in the 1980s (2020). These changes resulted in multiple mergers of paper pattern companies

¹¹ The English Baccalaureate (EBacc), first introduced as a performance measure for English schools in 2010, is a set of subjects – English (language and literature), maths, the sciences, geography or history and a language – defined as core to compulsory secondary education. Schools are increasingly measured on levels of participation and exam success in these subjects (UK Government, 2019).

and increased emphasis on craft (e.g. quilting) and costume-related products to bolster sales in addition to patterns for everyday clothing (ibid).

Renewed interest in home sewing in the twenty-first century has brought with it a new generation of magazines and patterns. Today there are multiple specialist magazines catering for home sewists (e.g. *Simply Sewing*, *Prima*, *Love Sewing*, *Threads*), including more contemporary-looking titles designed to appeal to a new generation of home sewists (e.g. *Fibre Mood*, *Peppermint*). One of the significant developments in home sewing resources in the twenty-first century has been the development of PDF patterns that can be downloaded and printed at home (Martindale 2020). These patterns are produced by a growing number of small ‘indie’ (independent) pattern brands and individual pattern designers promoting and selling their patterns online. This new generation of patterns are hailed by many sewists, including those in Martindale’s study (2017, 2020), as being easier to use than traditional sewing patterns because their associated instructions use less technical language and are accompanied by photographs rather than drawn illustrations (see Figures 12 and 13 in Section 5.3). Some of the more established indie pattern brands also provide online sewalongs, enabling home sewists to watch a video of an item being made step-by-step and sew along with each stage if they wish. To give a sense of scale, The Foldline (a popular online sewing platform) sells patterns from over 200 indie pattern brands alongside those from larger ‘commercial’ pattern brands – often referred to as online as ‘the big four’ (Vogue, Simplicity, McCall’s and Butterick). Commercial patterns continue to be pre-printed on tissue paper, and accompanied by black and white illustrated instructions that have been standard for decades (see Figures 11 and 13 in Section 5.3).

In contrast to the limited *academic* writing addressing sewing, the amount of writing related to clothes sewing online (e.g. in blog and social media posts) and in popular sewing manuals is vast and continually evolving. Changing perceptions of what people want and need in terms of sewing instruction have resulted in clothes sewing skills being continually repackaged – from the dense text and scant black and white illustrations of Annie Paterson’s 1930s *The Big Book of Needlecraft* and Elizabeth

Craig's *Needlecraft* of the 1940s and 1950s, through the weighty colour illustrated practical manuals produced by Singer, Vogue, McCall and others in the 1960s and 70s, to today's sewing books providing patterns and instructions from named pattern designers and former *Sewing Bee* contestants (see Appendix 2 for examples). The internet has also made vast amounts of information and instruction freely available online (Martindale 2020). Sewing instruction and advice is no longer confined to the printed advice of 'experts' or to the sharing of knowledge in-person, either within or outside the home. Sewing blogs, YouTube, Pinterest and Facebook are all mentioned by interviewees in Martindale's study as routes to identify new projects, learn new skills or connect with others about the practice of sewing (2017).

Sewing and sustainability

In popular culture, links are often made between home sewing and sustainability (Bain 2016, Farry 2008, Bravo 2020, Peppermint Magazine¹²). However, academic research substantiating this link is limited. The most extensive participatory study exploring the link between clothing-related textile craft practices and sustainability is the multidisciplinary Sensibility for Sustainability (S4S) project (Saunders et al. 2019, Hackney et al. 2019, 2020, 2021, Willett et al. 2022). This action research project combined social science and arts-based research to explore the latent possibilities of sustainable behaviour change through engagement with textile crafts. The study brought participants together in a series of workshops mirroring the lifecycle of clothing, from fabric production to the making, mending and modifying of clothes – including pattern cutting and sewing as well as spinning, weaving, reknitting and darning (Hackney et al. 2019). The affective aspect of making and particularly 'making together' in the shared and supportive space created by the workshops is highlighted in this project (Hackney et al. 2020, 2021). The study builds on Hackney's earlier work, positioning textile craft practices as a form of 'quiet activism' – a means of 'thinking and acting independently, staking a place in the world and making one's voice heard' (Hackney 2013: 172). It also responds to the political dimensions of affect and

¹² Peppermint Magazine – described on its website as 'an Australian quarterly print magazine focused on style, sustainability, sewing and substance' which 'champions ethical fashion, diversity, inclusivity, climate action, slow living, sewing and DIY, social justice and more' – <https://peppermintmag.com/>

behaviour change vis-à-vis the structural context within which clothing is ordinarily encountered (Willett et al. 2022). As the team behind the S4S study explain, affect is a concept based on the understanding of emotions as ‘sticky markers which attach to things and ideas’ which in turn shape identities and influence behaviours (Hackney et al. 2019: 3). Affective responses, the authors emphasise, are utilised by the fashion industry to sell clothes (Willett et al. 2022). The S4S project identifies potential to reroute emotional attachments from ‘what might otherwise seem to be “rational choices” and transfer them to more sustainable behaviours’ (Hackney et al. 2019: 3). By connecting with participants’ pre-existing interests, the project stimulates ‘pro-environmental’ behaviour change, reinforced by being part of a peer group (Willett et al. 2022). This approach to behaviour change is seen as preferable to those that attempt to ‘nudge’ people into preferable behaviours with information and incentives which can be alienating and ineffective in bridging the value-action gap: the gap between what we understand to be ethical and what we do in everyday life (ibid.) The S4S study suggests that clothes-related textile craft skills can become sustain-abilities in the right ‘cultural milieu’ (2022: 233). This finding emphasises the importance of the culture within which textile craft skills – including sewing – are encountered.

Fletcher identifies the sewing and knitting of clothes as marginalised practices, ‘often the preserve either of [the] highly skilled “crafter”, or a badge of youthful experimentation, rather than a widespread and accepted fashion practice on a par with shopping for clothes’ (2016: 61). She notes the dissatisfaction that people sometimes feel with the clothes they have made as ‘hinting perhaps that home-production is no panacea’ (Fletcher 2016: 61). She continues:

it seems that consumerist expectations of fashion reinforce the marginal aspects and individual idiosyncrasy of non-market fashion activity, framing them as temporary involvements to be dabbled with for a few short years before graduating to the proper stuff: new shop-bought clothes. (Fletcher 2016: 61)

Twigger Holroyd (2017) also argues that relationships with homemade clothes can be complex and that amateur clothes making practices may not be inherently sustainable, beyond being a slower form of production. Before setting out the research questions to be addressed in this study, I will first briefly introduce literature that addresses the issue both Fletcher and Twigger Holroyd raise, regarding the sometimes ambivalent relationship people have with clothes they make for themselves.

3.5 Relationships with clothes

For amateurs choosing to make clothes for themselves, sewing is a skill, a craft hobby and an alternative means of acquiring clothes. In this context it is understood that the *outcomes* of the activity may be more important relative to the making *process* than literature relating to other amateur crafts may suggest (Twigger Holroyd 2014, 2016). In this section I will briefly introduce literature addressing relationships with clothes, including how these may differ for homemade clothes as opposed to those bought readymade.

Why we wear what we wear

Sophie Woodward's (2007) ethnographic study of why women wear what they wear reveals the complexity of these clothing choices and highlights the extent to which they are informed by multiple, often contradictory, considerations relating to women's sense of self. Like Fletcher's later *Craft of Use* (2016), Woodward's study clearly demonstrates how fashion, as conceived and presented by the fashion industry, is only one influence amongst many when it comes to what, and how, clothes are actually worn. Woodward (2007) presents an overview of key theoretical insights that are useful in understanding these complex relationships with clothes. These insights include the 'perpetual unresolved tension between individuality and conformity' observed by Simmel as a core characteristic of fashion (Simmel 1971 cited in Woodward 2007: 120). Woodward emphasises the relational nature of identity and the extent to which we view ourselves in part through other people's eyes when deciding what to wear in different social contexts (Kaiser 2003 cited in Woodward 2007). This relational understanding of identity links to the concept of 'the gaze' and its 'internalization', which affects perceptions of self in relation to others (Mead 1982

cited in Woodward 2007: 10, 21). Woodward also highlights Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which recognises gender norms and idealised notions of femininity as reinforced through their performance (Butler 1990, 1993 cited in Woodward 2007). The body is central to these theoretical perspectives, as recognised in Entwistle's characterisation of fashion as 'situated bodily practice' (2015: 77). When fashion is understood in this way – as situated bodily practice – the selection and wearing of clothes can be understood as 'embodied competences' (Entwistle and Wilson 2001 cited in Woodward 2007: 17). Woodward's own work builds on Miller's concept of objectification – in which the self is both externalised as, and created through, objects such as clothes (Miller 2010, Miller 1987 cited in Woodward 2007) – bringing a social anthropologist's material culture perspective to understanding women's clothing choices.

Through close observation of everyday clothing decisions being made in real time, Woodward is able to reveal the ambivalence and anxiety that can accompany these decisions and the complex material and socio-cultural factors at play. These factors, which Woodward suggests tend to be overlooked in semiotic readings of fashion, complicate the notion of fashion as pure self-expression of identity. Drawing on Miller's concept of objectification, Woodward suggests that standing in front of the wardrobe, a woman looks outward at herself through the mirror and into the wardrobe of clothes, asking simultaneously of her image and the garments, 'is this me?' and can I be 'that person'? (2007: 13). In Woodward's view, 'Clothing quite literally does the ontology of the self, where the self is a material practice that women are engaging with' (2007: 157).

Woodward's empirical research highlights the material, sensory and tactile aspects of clothing that are consequential to how clothes look and feel on the individual body. These aspects, as Woodward demonstrates, play a central role in what women actually wear, which might be particularly pertinent in understanding relationships with homemade clothes, where the wearer is more materially engaged in the production of the garment and its resulting look and feel.

‘Emotional Fit’

Embodied, emotional and material aspects of relationships with clothing are foregrounded in the ‘Emotional Fit’ project undertaken by Townsend, Sissons and Sadkowska (2017). The project used co-design, practice-based methods and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis to investigate aspects of emotional durability in clothing for older women. One of the key participants, Jackie Goode, articulates the sensibilities that she feels women her age have towards clothing (Emotional Fit 2017) and describes an enduring interest in fashion, style and agency whereby ‘the right “emotional fit” can still lift our spirits’ (Townsend et al. 2017: 196). Having grown up during the 1960s, the women involved in the Emotional Fit project had experienced the excitement of a thriving UK fashion scene in their youth as new styles conveyed a strong sense of freedom and self-expression for young people, distinct from the relative conformity of previous generations (Goode 2016). It was in part the sense of style, experienced as younger women, that participants in the Emotional Fit project felt was overlooked in the clothing available to them now that they were older. Having also grown up when home sewing was still thriving, many of these women had a first-hand material understanding of textiles, and of making clothes for their particular body (Townsend & Sadkowska 2018). The notion of fit encapsulated in the Emotional Fit project acknowledges both the physiological and the psychological needs of the wearer (Townsend & Sadkowska 2020), relating to the feel as well as the look of a garment and the material and cultural concerns highlighted by Woodward (2007).

Personal style

Having introduced the complexity of clothing choice and emotional aspects of an extended notion of fit, I will now consider literature that can help in thinking about relationships with clothes that are homemade. As Twigger Holroyd highlights in *Folk Fashion*, shop-bought clothes ‘have been “validated” by a chain of professionals’ (2017: 99). In the absence of this validation – where clothes are homemade – cues must be taken from elsewhere. Women’s magazines and the paper-pattern industry have traditionally been sources of assurance for those making clothes at home that what they are making is appropriate for the time (Spanabel Emery 1999, 2020,

Hackney 1999). Contemporary sewing patterns and magazines play a similar role. However, as von Busch points out, the morphing of the fashion landscape over the last two decades means there is now ‘no longer one dominant fashion’ (von Busch 2020: 17), but rather a multiplicity of different styles and influences co-existing at any one time. The rise in popularity of second-hand clothing (Butler 2021) and the increasing interest in making clothes at home amplifies the role of the wearer in styling or curating their own look from the materials (including pre-existing garments) available to them. For those with the confidence to do so, using clothes from eclectic sources or combining pattern and fabric to make clothes to construct one’s own style can be the joy of fashion. Yet for others this task might be the cause of the kind of ambivalence or anxiety that Woodward writes about.

In her insightful work interpreting the style narratives of the African diaspora, Carol Tulloch articulates style as agency:

I use the term ‘style’ as agency – in the construction of self through the assemblage of garments and accessories, hairstyles and beauty regimes that may, or may not, be ‘in fashion’ at the time of use. I see the styling practices of a layperson’s articulation of everyday life through their styled body as exercising that agency. (2016:4)

Amongst the style narratives informing Tulloch’s work (2020) are inspiring examples of clothes-making as a route to the expression of personal style. Elli Michaela Young also shares narratives of freehand pattern cutters from the African diaspora in Jamaica, who cut garments direct from the fabric to suit themselves (2020). Moseley (2001) and Buckley (1999) tell stories of working class women using sewing skills to please themselves and provide for their families. Similarly, findings from the 1937-50 Mass-Observation Project (cited by Hackney 1999) suggest that for women remaining at home until marriage, ‘dressmaking could be experienced as a liberating, even subversive, activity’ enabling them to ‘define their appearance and identity without regard, or in direct opposition, to their mothers’ opinions’ (1999: 87). These examples show how motivations for sewing, particularly for the young and the less well off,

reflect desires for self-expression in addition to thrift in the middle of the twentieth century. I am interested in where aspects of style and agency, or style as agency, might arise in the motivations, experiences and sewing choices of beginner sewists today.

Making and wearing home-sewn clothes

As we have seen in the sections above, making clothes and getting dressed can both be understood as embodied material practices. The two come together when trying to make garments to clothe the individual body. Addie Martindale identifies control over one's self-presentation as a key motivation for the home sewists interviewed for her study (2017). Martindale's theme of control is linked to control of appearance, clothing choice and sewists' decisions about whether to 'make or buy' items of clothing. This notion is a more individualised, and I think less useful, concept than agency when trying to understand relationships with homemade clothes, which Woodward's (2007) work would suggest are more social and context-specific. As Twigger Holroyd discusses in *Folk Fashion* (2017), the reality of making and wearing homemade clothes is more complex than simply suiting oneself, not just because of the skill involved in making garments but also because of the judgements made by the makers and intended wearers of home-constructed clothes. As Twigger Holroyd shows, homemade clothes tend to be judged in their own right as the product of (more or less) skilled craft practice and, as finished items, in relation to shop-bought clothes. Assessments of homemade clothes by those who make them are also seen to change over time, as expectations of the items made are adjusted (up or down) based on experience (Twigger Holroyd 2017).

Research addressing textile crafts as sustainable practices (e.g. mending, altering or upcycling), often carried out in workshop settings, provides little insight into what happens to the clothes involved once they leave the 'sewing circle' (Hall & Jayne 2016: 227). If we adhere to the idea that sustainable clothes are those in use (Fletcher 2016) then whether or not clothes that are made, mended or altered in the domestic sphere are worn is an important aspect of their sustainability, and therefore, of interest to this study.

3.6 Sewing as sustain-ability

As an aspect of contemporary clothing culture, home sewing is on the rise and linked, at least by some, to ideas of sustainability. Consequently, home sewing is worthy of further exploration as a potential tactic in the transition towards more sustainable fashion futures. As a first step in drawing this chapter to a close, I will articulate the perspectives on this potential tactic that I am taking in this research.

As noted above, people see a link between home sewing and sustainability. Given home sewing's increasing popularity, the experiences of those inspired to learn to sew clothes for themselves provide an interesting perspective from which to examine issues of fashion sustainability as popularly understood. The presumed link between home sewing and sustainability raises the question of whether or not sewing practices are sustainable in and of themselves, in terms of both material efficiency and clothing use. This aspect of sustainability links craft practice and the material and cultural context within which sewing practices are encountered.

Acknowledging the issues of material efficiency and clothing use articulated above, I borrow the hyphenated 'sustain-ability' from Fry (2009) to think about the potential of home sewing and the design of home sewing resources as futuring practices, i.e. practices that contribute to sustainment beyond the current cultural paradigm of economic growth logic. More prosaically, I ask whether sewing skills, learnt in the current UK cultural context, might be considered 'sustain-abilities' – that is, abilities that enable people to behave more sustainably in relation to clothing.

3.7 Focus of research

As I have explained in this chapter, fluctuating interest in sewing as a material and cultural practice has made for a partial and incomplete picture of home sewing's cultural significance. Who engages in sewing and how sewing skills have been learnt in the past has clearly changed over time. Academic literature tells us little about how sewing skills are being learnt today. As Hall and Jayne suggest:

There remains scope for much-needed empirical research into contemporary dressmaking practices specifically, and fabricatures at large, targeted at understanding these practices as they occur, as well as the broader historic, economic and social practices, traditions and memories in which they are situated.

This involves a keen attention to the politics of gender, class, life course, and so on, and a recognition that [...] such practices remain pertinent and present to the lives and histories of many women in the UK today and which provide reason enough to value them as a topic of academic interest and investigation. (2016: 230).

This study responds to Hall and Jayne's call by engaging with sewing practices as experienced by beginners seeking to learn to make their own clothes within the home.

CHAPTER 4 – METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This study focuses on beginners learning to sew clothes for themselves at home. The intention is to shed light on contemporary amateur clothes sewing practices in their own right and to use this knowledge, and the experience of sewing beginners, as an alternative starting point from which to think about fashion sustainability. This chapter is set out in five parts: an introduction to the research approach and selection of methods; a detailed description of the three phases of research undertaken and methods used in each; an outline of the data generated and the approach to analysis; a discussion of research ethics; and a reflexive account of some of the issues arising from the research in practice.

4.2 Research approach

Feminist stance

This research is conducted from a feminist perspective, starting from the onto-epistemological position that all ‘knowledge is situated in the material lives of social actors’ and that knowledge is therefore both ‘situated and discursive’ (Hekman 1997: 357). The research is about, and explored through, engagement with the highly gendered skill of sewing and, as such, encompasses three features common in feminist research:

- it is attentive to the experiences of everyday life as a route to knowledge;
- it takes an interest in activities undertaken within the home, as they inform understandings of wider socio-economic and political issues; and
- it starts from an understanding that our bodies (our own materiality) shape our understanding and experience of the world – as sensory beings and embodied selves.

The attraction of feminist epistemologies for research relating to sustainability is, in part, that feminist thinking has been less implicated in the Enlightenment modes of thought that have dominated (for better and for worse) and led to our climatically

precarious present. A feminist stance, which ascribes value to culturally feminised and previously undervalued practices and activities (e.g. textile crafts, care) feels like a particularly potent and fertile position from which to explore alternative ways of being.

Participatory methodology

In line with the onto-epistemological stance outlined above, the methodology for this research is qualitative and participatory. Qualitative research embraces the situated and socially constructed nature of knowledge. Through gathering and analysing different forms of non-numerical data (including text, image, audio and video) qualitative research methods facilitate the interpretation and theorisation of social and experiential aspects of life. Within this qualitative paradigm the interpretations and meanings attributed to experiences by both research participants and researchers are acknowledged, valued and made visible (Braun & Clarke 2013, Walsham 2006). As such, qualitative research methods are not designed to ‘harvest’ data capable of revealing objective truths, rather they generate data that lends itself to interpretative analysis in which themes are developed and data-theory links are made by the researcher (ibid.).

The use of participatory methods was inspired by the work of Amy Twigger Holroyd (2013), the S4S project (Saunders et al. 2019) and the work of others in the Stitching Together Network¹³ (Stitching Together 2020). These researchers and practitioners use textile craft workshops to tap into embodied craft experiences and facilitate thinking with and through interaction with material things. By bringing researchers, participants and materials together in close proximity, workshops create space for textile craft skills to be shared, practised and observed. These participatory workshop-based methods provide a way to elicit live – and lively – insight into textile craft practices (new and old), as encountered by ‘ordinary’ people in ‘everyday life’. The multi-method

¹³ The Stitching Together network, led by Dr Emma Shercliff and Dr Amy Twigger Horoyd and funded by the UK’s Arts & Humanities Research Council, brings researchers, textile practitioners and enthusiasts and project commissioners together to foster critical dialogue around participatory textile research and practice. - <https://stitchingtogether.net/>

approach set out below was adopted and adapted initially as a proxy for in-person workshops due to the circumstances of Covid-19. In practice, I found the combination of remote methods described below proved well suited to the elucidation of amateur craft practices which, while taking place at home alone, are often themselves partly digitally mediated.

4.3 Research questions

The research is designed to address the following three questions:

- How are basic sewing and clothes construction skills learnt at home?
- What resources help people to learn basic sewing and clothes construction skills?
- How does learning basic sewing and clothes construction skills change amateur sewists' relationships with clothes?
- To what extent can home sewing be seen as a sustain-ability and what role might it therefore have as a tactic in the transition to more sustainable fashion futures?

The inclusion of both 'basic sewing' and 'clothes construction' skills in the formulation of these questions underscores the fact that the research is intended to address the machine-sewing skills required for the making of clothing from scratch, as opposed to other skills required for mending and altering pre-existing garments, which are often carried out by hand sewing. This formulation, of 'basic sewing *and* clothes construction skills', also acknowledges a fuller range of skills necessary for clothes making, which include but are not limited to the act of sewing or stitching seams (by hand or machine). In choosing this terminology I have deliberately avoided the more gendered language of 'dressmaking', although this term would denote much the same skills. In common with others engaging with the contemporary online world of amateur sewing, I have adopted the gender-neutral term 'sewist' to refer to people who sew (Bain 2015). In doing so I make no assumption about who sews and avoid the textually problematic 'sewer' which is fine when spoken but conjures up unhelpful images of municipal pipework when written or searched online. The fourth research question builds on the other three and was formulated to link the literature informing the study to the close empirical exploration of the first three questions.

The basic sewing and clothes construction skills referred to in these questions are those required to make a wearable garment. These skills were not pre-defined for the purposes of the research but are made apparent through participants' engagement with the research and are discussed amongst the findings (Chapters 6-8). The third question, which addresses changing relationships with clothes, is not intended to pre-suppose that any such change occurs but rather to focus attention on any interrelationships that may emerge, linking clothes making to changes in the perception, purchase or use of clothing.

4.4 Methods

A combination of participatory, ethnographic and qualitative interview methods was used across the three phases of research:

- **Phase I** – Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven people who had recently started sewing clothes for themselves at home.
- **Phase II** – Combined journaling and video elicitation methods were used to gain a more in-depth view of the learning experiences of another five participants (all complete sewing beginners) as they too started trying to make their own clothes at home.
- **Phase III** – An in-person workshop and semi-structured follow-up interviews were conducted with the Phase II participants, adding a social aspect to the research and inviting participants' reflections on what they had learnt and what, if any, difference this had made to their view of sewing and/or clothes.

Full details of how these three phases of research were conducted are set out in the following section. First, I will provide a brief rationale for the combination of methods used.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out in Phase I to inform the design of the subsequent phases of the research. These preliminary interviews highlighted how a new generation of indie sewing patterns and online sewing content encourages and enables self-directed remote learning by amateur sewists. Phase II of the research was

devised to understand the experiences of amateur sewists more fully and gain insight into what helps and hinders them in their attempts to sew their own clothes.

As the activity being studied is by definition one that takes place behind closed doors, I considered that diaries may be a useful method for capturing details of participants' sewing experiences. Psychologists Bolger et al. (2003) suggest that diaries are useful in examining experiences in 'everyday situations' (2003: 580) and in reducing the factor of 'faulty reconstruction' (2003: 585) and retrospection that can impact traditional interviews. Diaries achieve this by shortening the time-lapse between the occurrence – in my case the making activity – and the participant's reporting of it. Sociologists Zimmerman & Wieder (1977) suggest a diary-interview method for use where direct ethnographic observation would be problematic – either impossible, as is the case in my research, or where the 'observer effect' (1977: 480) would prove too impactful, as might be the case in their research of counter-cultures. In the diary-interview method, diaries are used 'in conjunction with diary-interviews as an approximation to the method of participant observation' (1977: 485). Zimmerman & Weider suggest that the diary and subsequent interview allows the participant to maintain the dual roles of 'performer' and 'informant' that they would have in a traditional ethnography, where the researcher observes and probes and the participant both acts and responds, or performs and informs.

As the proposed participants in this research were to be sewing beginners, I was concerned that they may find it difficult to fully articulate what they had done, and so what they had experienced, in words. Diaries might well capture learners' thoughts about sewing but less so the practices that gave rise to them. The combination of diary and interview would have advantages over diaries alone. However, the interviews in Zimmerman & Weider's case were extremely long and detailed, sometimes involving a hundred-plus questions over 'five hours of interrogation' (1977: 491). Interviews of this intensity would be impractical (and, I would suggest, unethical) for a project in which participants were already trying to get to grips with a complex set of skills that were new to them. Diary interviews would tell more than diaries alone but might inhibit participation in the project and still would not allow for the craft practice to be

seen in action. To achieve this 'in action' insight, I concluded that some use of video would be essential in this project.

Sophie Woodward (2020) and Sarah Pink (2015) emphasise the value of video in material and sensory ethnography respectively. Woodward suggests that video footage can help you to 'notice things you would not have noticed during an event' (2020:137). Pink suggests that video can help to capture participants' sensory interactions with their environment – as was the case in the laundry tours that form part of her work on the 'sensory home' (2015: 127). Video footage recorded by participants and watched back alongside them can 'generate empathetic encounters' – a technique Pink used in work carried out with cycle commuters (Pink et al. 2017: 372). Videos played back to participants in this way become 'reflective artefacts' (Toraldó et al. 2018: 457). Like the diaries in Zimmerman and Wieder's diary-interviews, participant-generated videos can be both 'data in their own right' and 'data-generating device(s)', that open participants' experiences up to further reflection and questioning (1977: 489). Rana and Smith (2020) also use a video elicitation process to explore a craft encounter between a mother with dementia and her daughter, knitting together. The encounter is filmed and then re-watched with the daughter to elicit her reflections on the experience. Rana and Smith suggest that the advantage of using video in this way is that it allows 'the body as sense-making subject' to be accounted for in the research (2020: 53). The arguments for using video as a way to capture sensory, material and embodied aspects of practice are compelling.

In the circumstances of this research the video footage would need to be participant generated. This again raised concerns about asking too much of participants by giving them another thing to do while also taking their first steps towards learning to sew. The approach taken to the production of both journals and video clips (see Sewing Journals, Video Clips and Video Elicitation/Workshop Encounters below) was developed to minimise the burden on participants, while facilitating a research process in which their sewing practices could be 'seen'. Bolger et al. (2003) prompted me to consider whether journals should be time- or event-based, analogue or digital, spontaneous or prompted. Zimmerman & Weider (1977) prompted me to think about

how participants might be guided to record the kind of information that would be of value to the research. Journal entries and video clips both have dual roles as data in their own right and as means to generate data via a further elicitation process. In addition, journal writing and the video elicitation processes presented opportunities for reflection on the part of participants, which – it was hoped – may also prove helpful to them in the learning process (Dunlap 2006, Schön 1987).

The in-person workshop at Phase III was introduced to add a social dimension to the participatory element of the research and allow hands-on material practices and the garments made in Phase II to be shared and reflected upon. The workshop also provided an opportunity to test some of the themes emerging from the earlier phase of research with the group. Follow-up interviews, conducted a few months later, explored whether or not participants had continued sewing and what, if any, difference the experience of learning to sew had made to them or their practices in relation to the selection, purchase or use of clothes, including clothes they had made.

4.5 Phases of research

The three phases of the research were conducted as follows (Figure 3).

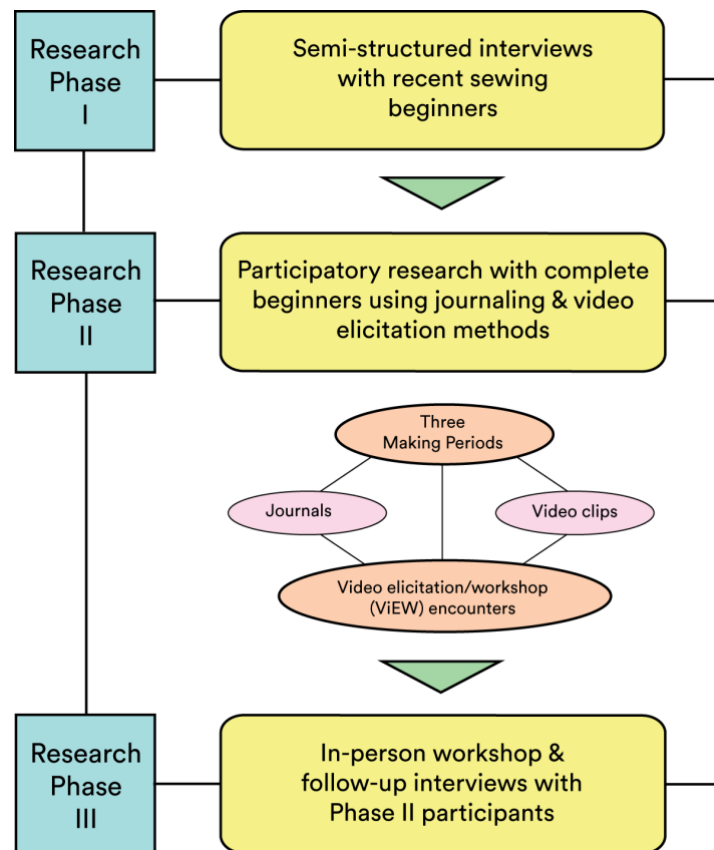


Figure 3 - Three Phases of research. A more detailed illustration of these Phases is provided at the end of this section (see Figure 8).

Phase I

Semi-structured interviews

In early summer 2020 I conducted semi-structured, one-to-one, online interviews with five women and two men who had recently learnt to sew clothes for themselves. Interview participants were recruited through a combination of convenience or snowball sampling (Braun & Clarke 2013) and an open call posted on the Facebook page of The Fold Line, an online pattern shop and review site catering to contemporary home sewists. Three interviewees were people known to existing contacts, while the other four responded to the Facebook call. Five of the interviewees self-identified as White British or ‘mostly White British/European’, one as Black African and one as Bangladeshi. The interviewees were all UK based, aged between 25 and 43 and described themselves as having been sewing clothes for themselves for varying lengths of time between three months and two years. During the interviews it became clear that three of the female participants had made previous attempts at learning to sew

clothes before embarking on their more recent learning at home. A list of interviewees can be found in Table 2.

Interviews of 40-60 minutes were conducted online using the participant's choice of platform (either Zoom or Teams). The interviews were semi-structured, based around an interview schedule of eight initial questions (Kvale 1996) focusing on motivations for learning to sew clothes, experiences of learning to sew, the resources used and any future sewing plans. The interview schedule included follow-up prompts that could be used when I wanted a participant to expand on a particular point or consider another dimension of the question (Appendix 3). The semi-structured nature of these interviews also allowed me to pursue interesting but unanticipated tangents introduced by participants in their initial responses.

Phase I interviews were transcribed, inductively coded and analysed (see Data Analysis below) to produce the preliminary findings set out in Chapter 5 and used to inform Phases II and III of the research. For example, Phase I interviewees' use of patterns and resources at home to learn their sewing skills, rather than, in the majority of cases, attending classes, informed the design of the Phase II research and the initial activities I asked Phase II participants to engage in and record. The desire not to waste materials, which arose as a concern for interviewees in Phase I and participants in Phase II, informed the activity in the Phase III workshop.

Phase II

Following the Phase I interviews, a more substantive participatory phase of research was conducted throughout 2021 with five new participants, recruited on the basis that they were beginners with no prior clothes sewing experience (see Participant Recruitment below). The intention of this phase was to gain a more in-depth view of the embodied material experiences of people learning to sew their own clothes at home. Each Phase II participant took part in an introductory one-to-one online Workshop followed by three periods of making activity (referred to, for ease of reading, as Making Periods). In each Making Period, participants recorded their making experiences through written journals and short video clips, which were used to inform

video elicitation/workshop encounters that took place at the end of each period (see below). The experiences described by participants, the problems they encountered, and the questions they asked framed the conversation that took place in these encounters and informed decisions about what their next sewing activity would be. The key aspects of this research approach are outlined in more detail below.

Participant recruitment

Participants were recruited via an open call publicised on Instagram and Twitter on 26 January 2021 (see Appendix 4a-c). The call was also circulated by two not-for-profit organisations – Zero Waste Leeds and Leeds Community Clothes Exchange – based in Leeds, the city in the north of England where I live. The call asked for volunteers who were over 18 and interested in making their own clothes but who had never made a garment before. Around 100 expressions of interest were received from potential participants within 48 hours. All those expressing interest were invited to sign up for a no-obligation information session to find out more about the research. In total, 29 potential participants (28 women and one man) attended one of four online sessions which covered the purpose and format of the research and offered a chance to ask questions (see Session Outline in Appendix 5). I made clear in these information sessions that this was not a pedagogic project in which those taking part would be taught to sew. While those participating would be given an introductory workshop and some support in getting started with sewing, I was seeking to understand beginners' experiences of learning to sew clothes when they try to do so at home with the resources available to them. I also made clear in these information sessions that fashion sustainability was the context within which the research was taking place but that an explicit interest in these issues was not a prerequisite for taking part.

Of the 22 people who remained interested after attending an information session, a group of five took part in Phase II of the project in full. These five participants were selected purposively to include a range of ages (Braun & Clarke 2013). Preference was given to those most clearly indicating intrinsic motivations for wanting to learn to sew clothes specifically, as opposed to those with more general interests in learning to sew. During the process of recruiting the final five participants, three people (including

the only male candidate) withdrew for a variety of reasons before completing ethical consent forms. As alternative participants were invited to join the project in their stead, additional priority was given to those living locally, thereby opening up the possibility of an in-person workshop later in the project (see Phase III). Consequently, the final group of participants were all based in or around Leeds. All were white European women aged between 22 and 43 and in this were typical of the demographics of the wider interested group.

Table 2: List of Phase I interviewees and Phase II participants.

Phase I Interviewees	Phase II Participants
Five women and two men. All based in the UK, aged between 25 and 43, with 3 months to 2 years sewing experience.	Five sewing beginners. All women aged between 22 and 43, based in or around the city of Leeds.
Thandi	Rasa
Elly	Steph
Hope	Wendy
Alison	Jenny
Krish	Sophie
Adam	See Appendix 15a-e for more detail about these participants and their sewing activities.
Rebecca	

Introductory workshops

On joining the project, each participant attended an introductory one-to-one online workshop with me, conducted via Zoom. Prior to this, all participants had been offered the loan of a sewing machine if they did not have one of their own and had been sent an introductory guide to sewing resources in case they wanted to browse some of these in advance of the workshop (Appendix 6a). In the introductory workshops I ensured that participants could thread and safely operate a domestic sewing machine; gave a brief introduction to choosing sewing patterns and fabric; and provided information about what they were being asked to do to record their sewing experiences. Each workshop lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours and included plenty of time for participants to ask questions. Where it was helpful to demonstrate (e.g. machine threading) or show close-up details (e.g. of pattern envelopes) the Iriun webcam app was used to enable screen sharing from a second (smartphone) camera while continuing the ‘face-to-face’ call (Figure 4). Following the introductory workshop, each participant was sent a written guide recapping some of the information covered (Appendix 6b) and two brief guides setting out the kind of journal entries and video clips they were being asked to record (Appendix 7a & 7b). Having discussed basic sewing kit during the introductory workshop, any items participants did not already have were also provided (Appendix 8). The offer to borrow a sewing

machine (e.g. if a participant’s own machine proved unduly prohibitive to their learning experience) remained open throughout the project.

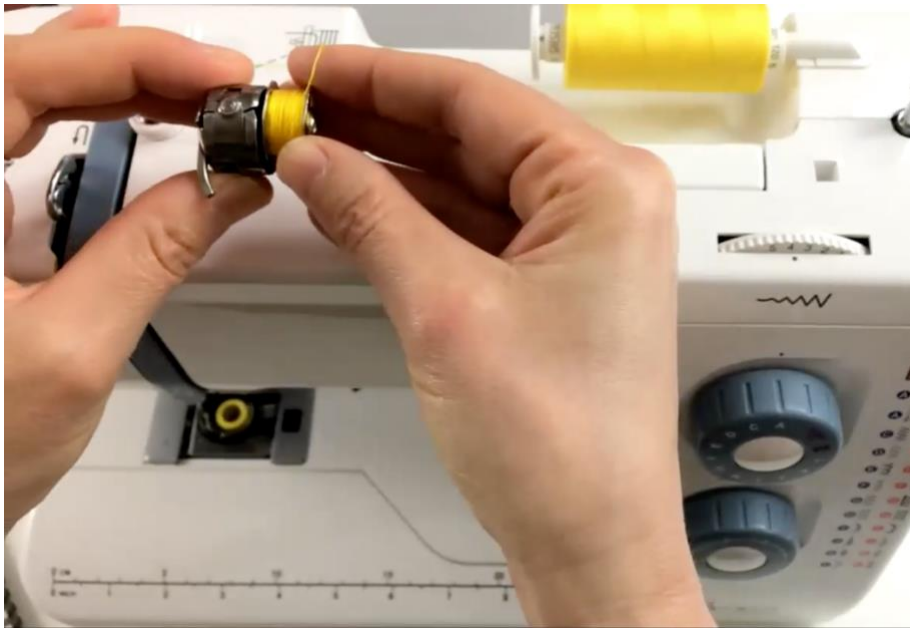


Figure 4 - Hand cam video still of my hands during Jenny’s introductory workshop.

Making periods & sewing activities

Over the course of the project, participants engaged in three Making Periods. In the First Making Period (based on the experiences of interviewees in Phase I), Phase II participants were asked to try making a garment using an ‘easy’ or ‘beginner’ pattern. Guidance on choosing patterns and fabric had been provided during the Introductory Workshop. I had suggested to each participant that they select a pattern for a relatively loose-fitting style that could be made from a mid-weight, non-stretch fabric and did not involve too many details or fastenings. Each participant had access to a small budget for the reimbursement of pattern and fabric costs and if they asked for further advice when choosing between patterns, I also provided this. I agreed the sewing activities to be undertaken in subsequent Making Periods with participants individually. These sewing activities were guided by participants’ individual interests, preferences, and experiences during the previous Making Period. Sewing activities undertaken during the second and Third Making Periods included further garment making (e.g. making a different type of garment or using a different type of

instruction), working on a specific technique (e.g. pattern adjustment or zip insertion) or a short exercise intended to focus in on an aspect of the sewing experience discussed in the interview at the end of the previous Making Period. Across the project participants engaged with a variety of patterns, kits, instruction types and short sewing exercises.

Sewing journals

I asked the participants to record information in their journal on a weekly basis, or each time they did some sewing if this was less often. Journal entries were based around five questions introduced to limit the time committed to this element of the research and guide the information and reflections they were being asked to record (Table 3). I gave participants the choice of digital or paper format and suggested that journals could include images as well as words if participants found this helpful (see guide at Appendix 7a). The participants shared their journal entries with me in advance of each interview. Where participants chose to write journals on paper, pages were photographed and shared with me via WhatsApp. Where journals were digital these were emailed to me (Figure 5).

Table 3: Guided journal content framed around five questions.

Guided journal questions
What am I doing?
How am I approaching it?
How is it going?
How do I feel about the outcome?
What do I plan to do next?

The purpose of the journals was threefold. Firstly, by providing insight into the participants' sewing activities, the decisions they were making and their feelings about what they were doing, the journal entries helped me to prepare for my next encounter with each participant (see Video Elicitation/Workshop Encounters, below). Secondly,

the journal entries provided data to triangulate with other sources. Thirdly, journal writing provided a vehicle for the participant's own reflection, understood to be useful in the process of learning, particularly in relation to creative practices (Schön 1987, Wood 2006). As journal entries formed only a small part of the data being collected, it felt important to minimise the burden that writing imposed. This prompted the decision to be flexible on format and timing and to provide a guide for journal content. The guidance given and the language of 'journal' rather than 'diary' were adopted in response to questions asked during the information sessions for potential participants, which suggested an understanding of 'diary' as open-ended confessional as opposed to the kinds of focused reflection that was intended for this research.

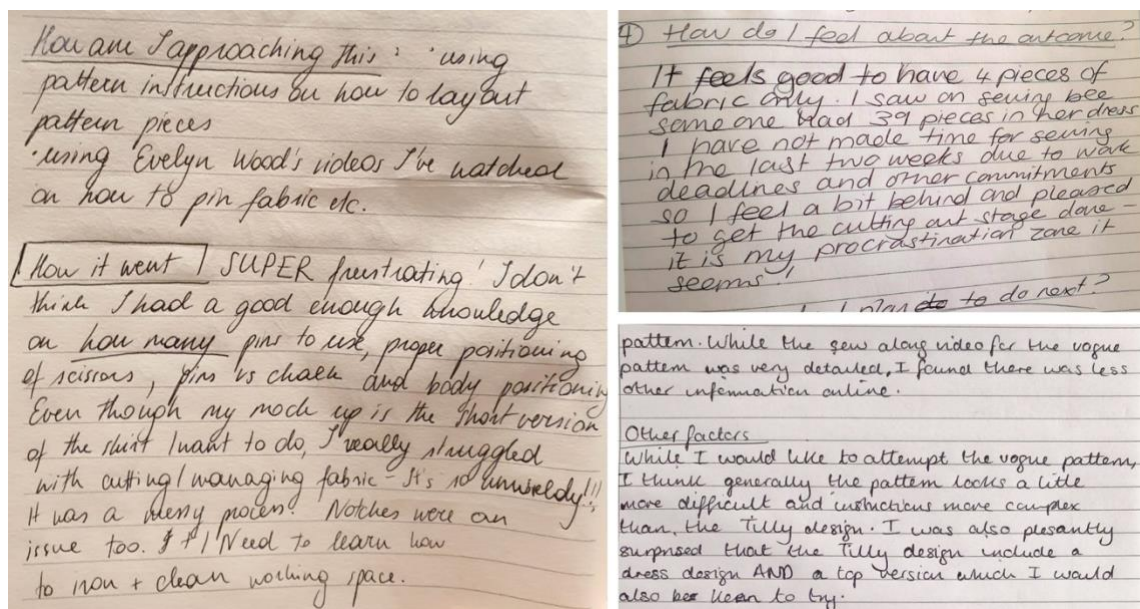


Figure 5 - Sample journal entries. Rasa during First Making Period (left). Wendy during Second Making Period (top right). Sophie during Third Making Period (bottom right).

Video clips

During each Making Period, I asked participants to film three short video clips (maximum 5 minutes per clip) showing what they were doing at different stages of their sewing activity. In the First Making Period, where participants were attempting to make a basic garment, I asked them to record themselves at the cutting out, construction and finishing stages. Participants were asked to capture what they were doing as they were doing it in the style of fly-on-the-wall footage rather than

performed or narrated content (see guide at Appendix 7b). The choice of which aspects of the sewing activity were to be recorded during each subsequent Making Period were agreed individually with each participant as the project proceeded. All the participants were offered a phone clamp if they needed one to help with filming on their smartphones (Figure 6).



Figure 6 - Stills from self-recorded video clips, (a) Jenny finishing her pyjama shorts; (b) Steph cutting out her 'Cleo' pinafore; (c & d) Sophie cutting out and sewing her 'Stevie' dress; (e) Rasa drafting her wrap top onto sheet fabric.

The request for participants to produce video clips was introduced as a way to gain insight into their hands-on, material experience of sewing as it occurred. These clips were a substitute for the insight into someone's experience that would be gained by looking over their shoulder or making with them in a communal space. Although digitally mediated, rather than materially present, these videos provided sight of participants' experiences in action. They were also the focal point around which the conversation in subsequent elicitation interviews took place.

Video elicitation/workshop encounters

One-to-one online 'elicitation interviews' were conducted with participants at the end of each Making Period. I viewed the journal entries and video clips that participants had sent ahead of each session. This enabled me to see what had been done and how the making activities had been experienced and understood (or sometimes misunderstood) by participants along the way. Journals and videos also helped identify aspects of practice I would want to ask questions about and to pre-empt some of the questions that participants might raise. The journals gave me insight into how participants felt about the sewing they had done, which helped set the right tone for the conversation.

Each of these sessions followed a similar format centred around the video elicitation process in which we watched the participant's screen-shared video clips together (see Table 4 below). I asked participants to talk through the experiences shown in these clips, including what they were doing with their hands and any decisions they were making along the way. The videos acted as prompts for participants to talk about their sewing experience and as a focal point for supplementary questions that arose. Although initially framed as video elicitation 'interviews', these 1.5 to 2 hour sessions developed to include discussion, and in some cases short demonstrations by me, of aspects of sewing practice that participants were seeking to understand. As the approach evolved through practice, I came to think of the sessions as video elicitation/workshop encounters – or ViEW encounters for short – combining the video elicitation process with a more responsive approach akin to that of an in-person workshop where the conversation responds to the doing of the activity in practice (see

Research in Practice below). As in the Introductory Workshops, I used a second (smartphone) camera in these encounters where necessary to show close-up detail or active hands in demonstration (as in Figures 4 & 26).

Table 4: Format for ViEW Encounters.

ViEW Encounter Format
Recap - Participant reflects on their sewing experience to date and how it has gone – supplementary questions/discussion may follow as in a semi-structured interview
Elicitation - Participant asked to talk through the experience shown in their video clips which are screen-shared, played and paused to facilitate reflections and discussion
Q&A - Participants given chance to ask any sewing-related questions they might have – conversations, illustrations or short demonstrations may follow using webcam
Next steps - Participant and researcher discuss what the next making activity will be – these may include trying a new garment style, pattern or instruction format or other short making exercise, responding to participant’s interests/experience so far.

Communication & Interaction

Arrangements for the Introductory Workshops and ViEW encounters were made via email. A closed WhatsApp thread was set up with each individual participant to facilitate sharing of journal content and images with me. Conversations relating to the choice of activity for the second and Third Making Periods (where this was not decided during the ViEW encounter) were conducted either via email or WhatsApp. The WhatsApp chat was also used where participants had questions about the research or sewing concerns they were unable to resolve with the resources available to them. During the introductory workshop, participants were offered the opportunity to join a group WhatsApp for participants in the project. All joined the group, where introductions and some intermittent sharing of activities, resources and outcomes took place. This WhatsApp group represented the only limited social interaction that occurred between participants during Phase II of the project. Neither the individual WhatsApp chats or the exchanges in the group WhatsApp were used as research data.

However, references to one or other of these threads of conversation were occasionally made during the ViEW encounters, as reflected in the transcripts.

Phase III

Workshop

A group workshop, which I ran on 20th March 2022 in a workshop/café space in north Leeds, brought participants together for the first time. This in-person event involved shared hands-on encounters with sewing practices and resources, facilitated conversation between participants, and introduced a limited social aspect to their learning experience and to the research. After introductions and a ‘show and tell’, the main workshop activity introduced a range of ways to use leftover materials generated in the process of learning to sew. This activity responded to one of the themes identified from the research: the desire to avoid wasting time, money or materials. The participants all chose to make different versions of pattern weights, using leftover materials from their earlier sewing activities, while we talked about their experiences and some of the potential research themes (Figure 7). A range of sewing resources (patterns and books) were available in the workshop space for participants to browse if they wished.

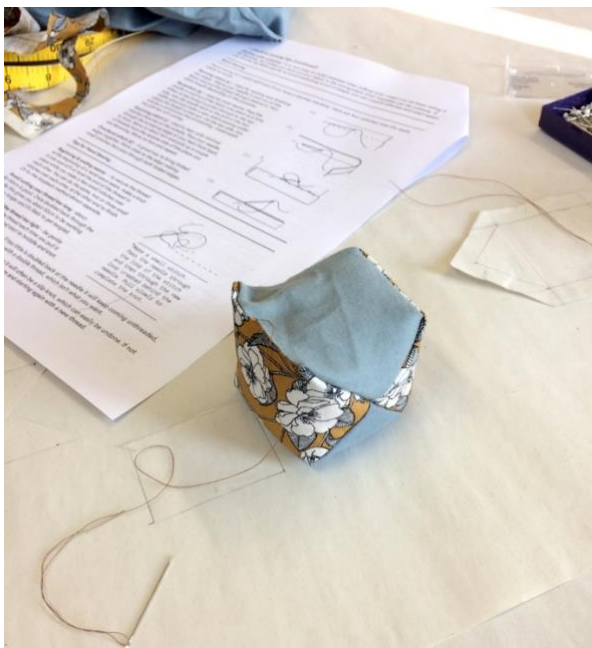


Figure 7 - Pattern weight made by Rasa from fabric offcuts during Phase III workshop.

Follow-up interviews

Short (30-40 minute) follow-up interviews were conducted in July 2022, four months after the workshop and around eighteen months after participants had first engaged with the project. These interviews, based on a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 9), sought participants' reflections on what they had learnt and what, if any, difference it had made to their views of sewing or their ongoing relationship with clothes. The interviews also helped to establish whether participants had continued sewing beyond the timeframe of the project and/or whether they had any plans to continue to do so.

4.6 Research timeline

The research was conducted between spring 2020 and the summer of 2022. Many aspects of everyday life were disrupted during this time due to the Covid-19 pandemic (see Table 5 below). Some form of restrictions were in place in England from March 2020 to January 2022, including three national lockdowns. As well as shaping the methods used in this research, Covid-19 also impacted on the lives of research participants and the timing of the research phases. While some participants had more time on their hands due to furlough at the outset of the project, others experienced increased pressures of work and family life during this period. The circumstances of the pandemic undoubtedly generated more interest in amateur clothes sewing and very likely boosted the number of potential participants in Phases I and II of the project. Changing circumstances in individual participants' lives meant that Phase II stretched over a 10-month period rather than the 5-6 months initially proposed. Covid-19 infection rates in the spring of 2022 also reduced participation in the Phase III workshop from five to three, as two participants were self-isolating. There are a number of places in the data where the circumstances of Covid-19 are referred to directly (e.g. having more time, shops being shut, working from home, returning to work). For all these reasons, Covid restrictions are included for context in the research timeline below. A visual representation of this research timeline can be found in Appendix 10.

Table 5: Research timing and local Covid context.

Research activity/timing	Covid Context
Phase I: Semi-structured interviews 22 June-7 July 2020	As first national lockdown was ending with restrictions still in place
Phase II: Participant recruitment & introductory workshops 26 January-20 April 2021	During third national lockdown
Phase II: Participatory research & ViEW encounters 2 April 2021-10 January 2022	As third national lockdown was ending with restrictions still in place
Phase III: In-person workshop 20 March 2022	Shortly after social distancing and mask wearing restrictions end.
Phase III: Follow-up interviews 25-29 July 2022	6 months after all restrictions end.

4.7 Data analysis

This section provides a summary of the research data and approach to data analysis. The mode of data analysis throughout this research is interpretative, such that that participants' interpretations of their experiences of learning to sew and my interpretation of those experiences both play a part. Through the process of transcription, inductive coding and analysis described below, I was able to build a story from the data that is both reflective of the participants' experiences and meaningful in relation to the research questions outlined above.

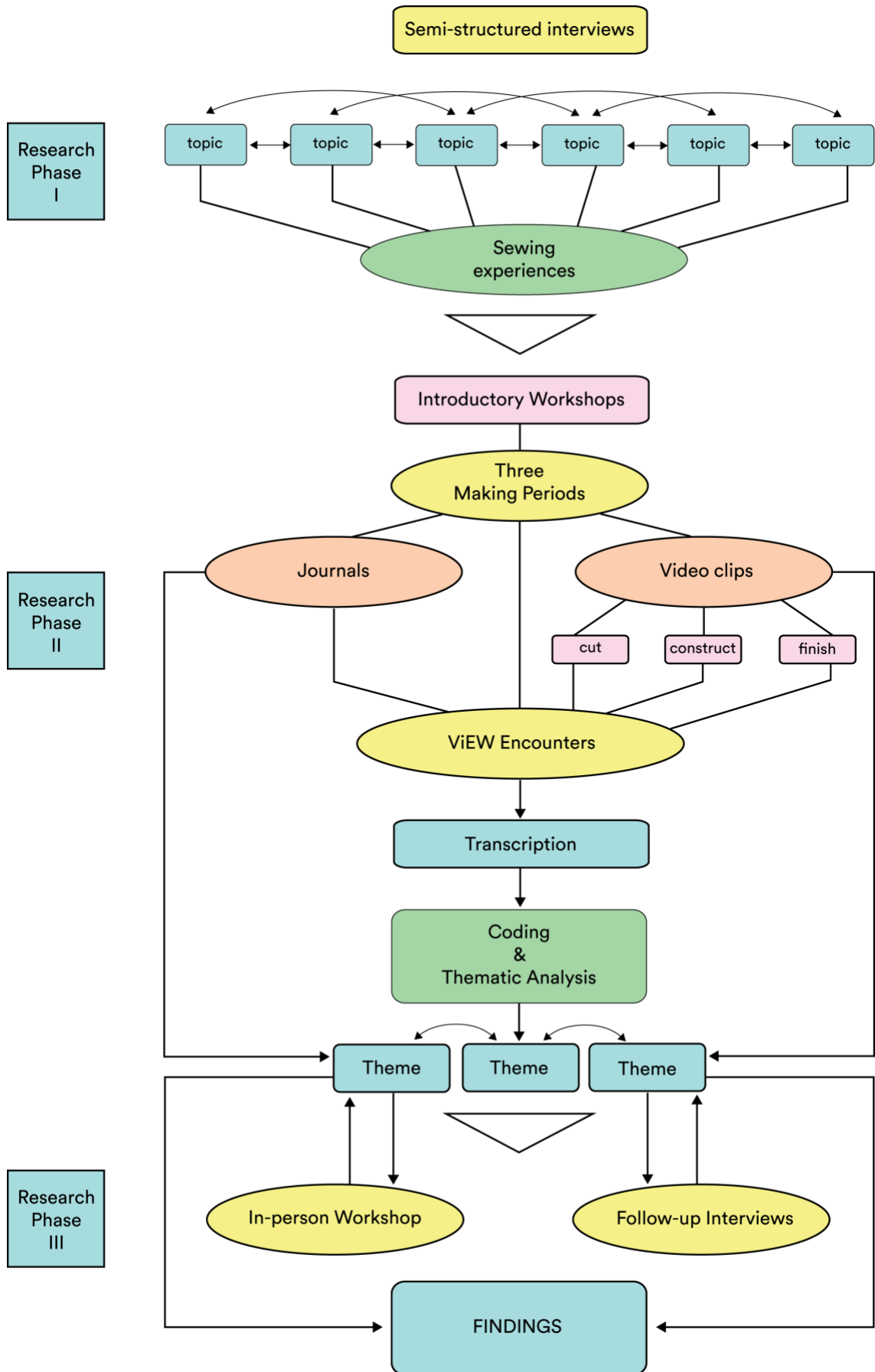


Figure 8 - Detailed illustration of three research Phases.

Data

The data in this study are a combination of audio, video, text and digital images (see Table 6).

Table 6: Forms of data collected across three research Phases

Research Phase	Research data
Phase I	Full interview transcripts
Phase II	Text and image files of participants' journal entries
	Participants' video clips of sewing in practice
	Full ViEW encounter transcripts
	Images and URLs of sewing resources used by participants and shared with me
	Participants' photographs of work in progress/finished items
Phase III	Partial workshop transcript
	Photographs taken during the workshop
	Partial interview transcripts

These various forms of data have all contributed to the analysis described below. Quotes, journal extracts, photographs and video stills from this data are used throughout the thesis to help articulate and illustrate the findings.

Sequence of analysis

Data from the three phases of the research were analysed separately. I used my analysis of data from each phase of the research to inform each subsequent phase. The ViEW encounter transcripts from Phase II were treated as the primary data sources from which to develop the analysis of the project as a whole. Once I had developed a meaningful set of themes from the Phase II transcripts (see Thematic Analysis below) I returned to the other data sources to triangulate the research findings. For example, participants' journals and video clips – which had been used as

‘reflective artefacts’ (Torraldo et al. 2018: 457) and ‘data-generating device(s)’ (1977: 489) during the ViEW encounters – were revisited following the development of themes from the transcripts of those encounters.

Data transcription

Phase I interviews and Phase II ViEW encounters were transcribed in full to ensure that quotes were seen in context when analysing the data. I transcribed the data myself to aid data ‘familiarisation’, identified by Braun and Clarke as one of six recursive phases of reflexive thematic analysis (2021: 39). Phase I interviews were transcribed directly in NVivo from audio recordings. Transcripts from Phase II ViEW encounters were produced by line-by-line editing of auto-transcribed text which was then uploaded to NVivo before coding. This line-by-line editing was done while replaying the video recordings of the ViEW encounters so that gestures, expressions and the video content being discussed could be seen and so aid comprehension of meaning. For pragmatic reasons of time, the Phase III workshop and follow-up interviews were transcribed only partially where their content added to existing findings or flagged up something previously un- or under-explored. These partial transcripts were made by editing relevant passages of auto-transcribed text.

Data coding

Transcriptions from Phase I interviews and Phase II ViEW encounters were inductively coded – ‘working up from the data’ (Braun and Clarke 2013: 4) – using NVivo software. NVivo was selected for pragmatic reasons, as I had both access to the software and on-hand support for learning to use it. The approach to coding was ‘complete’ as opposed to ‘selective’ in an attempt to identify ‘*anything and everything* of interest or relevance’ to answering my research questions (Braun and Clarke 2013: 206, original emphasis). New codes were created wherever the existing codes did not provide a place for transcript content, in response to the question ‘what is being spoken about here?’. Content was frequently assigned to more than one code. I kept notes during the coding process to capture coding issues that might need to be reviewed. For example, one note questioned whether the codes ‘learning through doing’ and ‘trial

and error’ were the same or different; they were different, as the former captured reflections on what had been learnt through doing something and the latter referred to a process observed or embarked upon. During the coding process I tried to capture divergent experiences as well as common experiences amongst the research participants. This led to some ‘participant-specific codes’ to return to at the analysis stage.

After coding each transcript I ‘tidied up’ the evolving list of codes, either splitting codes (if content amassing under a single code appeared to group more than one thing) or merging (if the content under two codes appeared too similar). During the coding process I clustered codes under broader headings (e.g. all codes relating to emotions), initially for ease of reference. These groupings were also periodically reviewed as the coding process continued. For example, when coding Phase I interview transcripts, codes relating to equipment and fabric were initially clustered under ‘Tools & Materials’. As the number of codes relating to fabric – choosing, sourcing, understanding – increased, ‘Fabric’ became a cluster in its own right, with a number of codes within it (see Appendix 11 for Phase I data coding).

Thematic analysis

In Phases I and II of the research, clustered codes were reviewed and reorganised through a reflexive process initially informed by Braun and Clarke (2021, 2022). Braun and Clarke describe their approach to reflexive thematic analysis as involving:

six – recursive – phases of: familiarisation; coding; generating initial themes; reviewing and developing themes; refining, defining and naming themes; and writing up. (Braun & Clarke 2020: 39).

This differs from other approaches to coding and data analysis – such as ‘coding reliability approaches’ and ‘codebook approaches’ – which identify codes and conceptualised themes earlier in the process (ibid.). In Braun and Clarke’s approach ‘themes [are] developed *from* codes, and conceptualised as patterns of shared meaning underpinned by a central organising concept’ (2020: 39 original emphasis). In

this approach coding is not understood as a ‘process of *identifying* evidence for themes’ (as in data reliability approaches) or used to ‘chart or map the developing analysis’ (as in codebook approaches). Instead, through the recursive process outlined above, themes are developed from the interpretation of the coded data (ibid.). My interpretation of Braun and Clarke’s reflexive approach is that, through the six recursive phases of thematic analysis, data (like theory) is used to *think with* and that patterns of meaning identified through that thinking become the conceptualised themes.

When working with the Phase I interview data my coding and review process resulted in ten groups of clustered codes (see Table 7). These clustered codes resemble what Braun and Clarke would consider to be topics rather than themes (2021, 2022). Unsurprisingly, seven of the groupings related closely to the topic of the questions asked in the interviews. Two further groupings ‘Feelings about sewing’ and ‘Fabric’ emerged, through the process of coding, as subjects that frequently arose within the interviews. The final grouping, ‘Stand alone codes’, contains five codes – Covid-19 & Lockdown, Equipment, Men sewing, Ready to wear, and Style – capturing subjects for which there was coded data that did not fit within any other grouping. I did not further refine the Phase I analysis to develop ‘themes’ in the way that Braun and Clarke use that term (2021, 2022). Instead the analysis of the Phase I data was used to inform the design of the Phase II and III research, to triangulate with later findings, and provide the largely ‘descriptive analysis’ (Braun & Clarke 2013: 174) presented in Chapter 5 – introducing contemporary experiences of learning to sew and setting the scene for the later thematic chapters (Chapters 6-8).

In Phase II, where there was a much greater quantity of visual and textual data to base my analysis on, I engaged more fully in the process of reviewing and reorganising the data in search of ‘patterns of meaning’ that would become ‘themes’. As I reviewed and considered the content of my codes I saw many different ways in which they could be grouped and interpreted. I started out trying to keep track of the evolving structure I was creating for the coded data. However, it soon became clear that I was not going to arrive at a single neat structure for the data in the same way I had in Phase I. Having

become very familiar with the data through the process of transcribing, coding, reading, ordering and reorganising aspects of it, I found it helpful to step back and think about it again more as a whole, asking myself two questions – ‘what is this data telling me about?’ and ‘what is interesting about that given the literature and framing of this project?’. I jotted down some evocative descriptions that immediately came to mind and added observations and notes I had made during the process of preparing for and engaging in the Phase II ViEW encounters. The key to identifying the themes explored in Chapters 6-8 turned out to be a combined approach of working from the grouped data and with this list of thoughts and observations (see Table 7).

Table 7: Theme development through coding, familiarisation and interpretation.

Phase I: Code groups	Phase II – Initial code groups	Phase II – Evocative descriptions, notes and, observations
Context and prior experience Learning process Limitation & impacts Motivations & Rewards Offline (advice/info/inspiration) Online (advice/info/inspiration) Patterns & instructions Feelings about sewing Fabric Stand-alone codes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Covid 19 - Equipment - Men sewing - Ready to wear - Style A more detailed breakdown of Phase I codes can be found in Appendix 11.	Learning process Information & instruction Emotions	Myriad online content Weird jigsaw pieces Guiding emotions Visualisation 3-dimensionality
	Fit and pattern adjustment Social connection Relationships with clothes Skills Techniques	Wearable clothes Non-conforming bodies Unfamiliar language, skills and techniques Personal style 'Making as connecting'
	Tools Materials Time, Space, Money Testing, mending, altering	Unfamiliar tools Intransigent machines Wilful materials Other material facts (time, space, money) Handy objects

On returning to the coded data I looked closely at the codes grouped under the topic of ‘emotion’. The ‘emotions’ data seemed to be both interesting and relatively easy to ascribe a ‘pattern of shared meaning’ – expressed as ‘learning to sew is an emotional experience’. Analysing the data captured under this ‘emotion’ theme I was able to identify that positive emotions appeared to group around the learning of new skills

and the making of wearable clothes; and negative emotions tended to group around having to make decisions from a position of uncertainty or grapple with (often material) aspects of sewing outside participants' immediate control (due to knowledge, skill or circumstance). These observations gave me two further 'candidate themes' (Braun & Clarke 2013: 224) of 'wearability' and 'materiality' which, like the 'emotion' theme, also appeared to fit with the Phase I findings and my rough list of thoughts and observations. I then considered 'wearability' and 'materiality' in relation to the literature to check that they would be 'writable themes' – i.e. themes that would be interesting and writable within the context of a thesis given the already grouped data. Having established 'wearability' and 'materiality' to be writable themes I was able to reorder some of the Phase II data to shape what would be written about under each theme. So, for example, data coded for various sewing techniques that the participants had encountered moved under the wearability theme as they linked to assessments of garment wearability. Similarly, data coded for time, space and money could be moved under the materiality theme because these influenced when, where, how and with what materials the participants worked. Together the three themes, 'emotion' 'wearability' and 'materiality', overlap to tell a compelling story about experiences of learning to sew in the contemporary UK context.

4.8 Ethics

Ethics have been understood in this research to include both compliance with the formal ethics processes of the academic institution (in this case Nottingham Trent University) and active consideration of 'ethics in practice' throughout the project (Kara 2018, Guillemin & Gillam 2004).

Formal ethics process

A favourable ethics opinion was sought from the Art, Architecture, Design and Humanities Research Ethics Committee at Nottingham Trent University prior to each phase of the research. Participant information sheets, consent and image release forms were signed by participants at the outset of each of the three phases of research outlined above (see Appendices 12, 13 & 14). Each participant information sheet aims to give the participant a clear picture of the research – including the purpose of the

research and how it will be conducted, the data that will be collected and how that information will be stored and used – in a form that is easily understood. The informed consent of the research participants and their freedom to withdraw from the study without explanation are key components of ethical research practice encapsulated in these documents. In the consent forms for Phases II & III I offered the participants the choice being named or anonymised in the stored data and the reporting of the research. This meant they had the option to be recognised and credited for their contribution if they wished. Most of the participants chose to be named; those who chose to be anonymised were ascribed a pseudonym.

Ethics in practice

The participant information and consent forms provided a baseline from which the research was conducted. I reconfirmed some aspects of consent with participants as the project unfolded. For example, participants were asked if they are happy for recording to take place at the start of each interview, workshop or online encounter. Where circumstances delayed or interrupted a participant's engagement with the project, they were reminded of their freedom to withdraw should they want or need to. At the end of Phase II, all participants were reminded of the anonymity preferences they had expressed at the beginning of the project and given a chance to revise those if they wished to in light of what they had shared. During Phase III participants were also given the chance to review and comment on the summary profiles written for them (see Appendix 15a-e). When it became apparent that Phase II of the project would need more time than had originally been proposed, a formal extension of the favourable ethical opinion for the work was sought and received.

The *Stitching Together Good Practice Guidelines* for participatory textile projects (Twigger Holroyd & Shercliff 2020) were used to think through practical research ethics for different stages of the project, from participant recruitment to aftercare. A broad set of values, including clarity, timeliness and flexibility, guided the management of the project. These values demonstrated respect for participants and helped to make participation as convenient and enjoyable as it could be. Inclusivity was considered when, for example, thinking through the equipment and resources the project would

provide, including essential sewing tools and machines if needed, a materials budget, and travel expenses and lunch for those attending the in-person workshop. The design of the research meant that time, space and access to a smartphone were prerequisites for participation, and this will have prohibited the involvement of some potential participants. The project was conducted with sensitivity to the fact that the research, including interviews, introductory workshops and ViEW encounters were, although digitally mediated, taking place within participants' own homes. Participants were encouraged to join these calls from the place where they would normally do their sewing and to ensure, when making video clips, that there was nothing in shot that they were not comfortable sharing.

Reflexivity on the part of the researcher is essential in interpretative qualitative (Markham 2017), ethnographic and participatory research, which centres around interactions between 'embodied and emplaced persons' who 'together create a shared space' (Pink 2015: 75). A reflexive approach is important to contextualise the research findings and account for the researcher's own subjectivity within it. To this end, reflexivity in research practice involves consideration of the situated self both in relation to the subject matter of the research and the research participants. The former requires self-awareness of the values and biases one brings to the research from one's own experience. The latter requires recognition of imbalances of power and privilege between researcher and participant (Kara 2018, Pillow 2003). I have made an effort to account for both these dimensions by being transparent and mindful in the way the research is conducted. I have sought to situate myself in the introduction to this thesis and in the methodological outline above. I have adopted a reflexive approach throughout the research to guide decisions made during the project, to inform my reflections on the research process (see below), and also, importantly, in writing the findings (Woodward 2020: 161).

4.9 Research in practice

The previous sections of this chapter have set out the research approach and methods used in the three phases of the project, the mode of data analysis, and the understanding of ethics employed. This section provides a reflexive account of some of

the issues arising from the research in practice as they relate to the methodological and ethical approach outlined above.

Participant-generated data

The request for participants to record their sewing experiences in video clips as well as journals undoubtedly introduced an additional complication to the already complex task of learning to sew clothes. After quickly overcoming some initial nerves, this was a challenge that the participants mostly handled extremely well. Flexibility, about the format of journals and exactly what was to be recorded in video clips, had been written into the guidance given to participants at the outset of the project (Appendices 7a, 7b). This flexibility was intended to minimise the burden on participants and make it easier for people to fit their participation into their everyday lives. Individual preferences, life circumstances and the domestic settings within which participants' sewing activities took place all had some impact on what was recorded. Consequently, there were variations in the type and amount of data captured by different participants and by individual participants over time. Across the three data elements (journal, video clips and ViEW encounter transcripts) over three Making Periods, a rich picture of each beginner's experience of learning to sew was achieved. Journals provide near-real-time reflections on participants' sewing experiences; video clips provide a real-time view of these embodied experiences in practice; and the ViEW encounters provide insight into how these sewing activities were experienced and understood. Following the ViEW encounters, participants also generously shared links to the online resources they had used to inform their sewing practices, which provided a valuable additional source of data.

Co-produced data

The structure for what became the ViEW encounters included four elements: a recap by participants, the video elicitation 'interview', an opportunity for questions and answers, and a discussion of next steps (Table 4). Within this structure the video elicitation (in which the participant's video clips were screen-shared and watched with them while they talked about their sewing experiences) was intended as the primary

activity. In practice, it proved difficult to keep the elements of the conversation as separate as the four-part outline might suggest. While the video elicitation process remained the focal point, the conversation in these encounters became more fluid and dialogic (Cooke 2022). Participants' telling of their sewing experiences and their questions about sewing were often intertwined. Some participants were more spontaneous and forthcoming during the video elicitation process than others. Sometimes it helped if I reiterated the things that I was interested in hearing about (e.g. what they were doing with their hands or the decisions they were making) or reminded participants that they were 'the experts on their experience' (Braun & Clarke 2013: 95). Sometimes I would ask questions about what a participant was doing in a video clip in order to start them talking. At other times I would do so to try and see what they were doing better 'through their eyes'.

These questions and the participants' recounting of the experiences shown in the video clips brought to light what had been experienced and understood, but also what had been misunderstood along the way. My awareness of this presented an ethical dilemma about when, whether and how to address such misunderstandings. Part of the aim of the research was to understand the experiences of people learning to sew clothes for themselves at home and the resources they use to do so. Participants were aware from the outset that my role was that of researcher (interested in their sewing experiences from a design and sustainability perspective), not teacher. Yet they were also aware that I had more experience of sewing than they did. I emphasised from the start that the success of the study did not rely on the quality of their sewing and that I was interested in whatever they were doing to try to construct the garments they had set out to make. However, in the intensity of the one-to-one online encounter – still a relatively unfamiliar mode of communication at the outset of the project – it was important that in asking participants to relay their experience of sewing they were not made to feel *they* were being judged or otherwise 'set up to fail'.

Where it became apparent that participants had misunderstood an aspect of something they were trying to sew or why something they were doing had not worked, my approach in response was empathic (Braun & Clarke 2013, Pink 215,

Kouprie & Sleeswijk Visser 2009). Consistent with the feminist framing of this research project as a whole, by adopting the stance of an empathic insider (rather than that of an outside observer) I was able to draw on my own experience of once having also been a sewing beginner to encourage participants in their sewing endeavours and facilitate an ongoing conversation about their experiences of learning to sew. In doing this I aimed to replicate the kind of dynamic that might occur more naturally in an in-person workshop, where a participant's questions and the researcher/facilitator's observations occur in the process of the activity being undertaken in real time. I came to think of this as a quasi-workshop approach, hence reconceptualising the elicitation 'interviews' as video elicitation/workshop (ViEW) encounters (Cooke 2022).

This shift to a more dialogic approach made my role in the encounters a complex one to navigate as I alternated between the position of researcher/designer aiming to elicit the participants' experiences and that of facilitator/'mentor' (experienced other) trying to support and encourage participants in their attempts to learn to sew (Figure 9, Cooke 2022). The balance between the researcher/designer and facilitator/'mentor' roles – shifting between modes of elicitation, motivation, empathy and knowledge sharing – was a tricky one to strike and one I felt I did not always get 'right' (Cooke 2022). However, I believe this more dialogic approach, which allowed conversation to flow more naturally and for the elicitation process as a whole to continue as an exchange, was the right one to take. I would align this approach with an 'ethics of care' that is flexible to individual circumstances (Kara 2018: 35) and appropriate to the reciprocal nature of participatory research (Twigger Holroyd & Shercliff 2020).

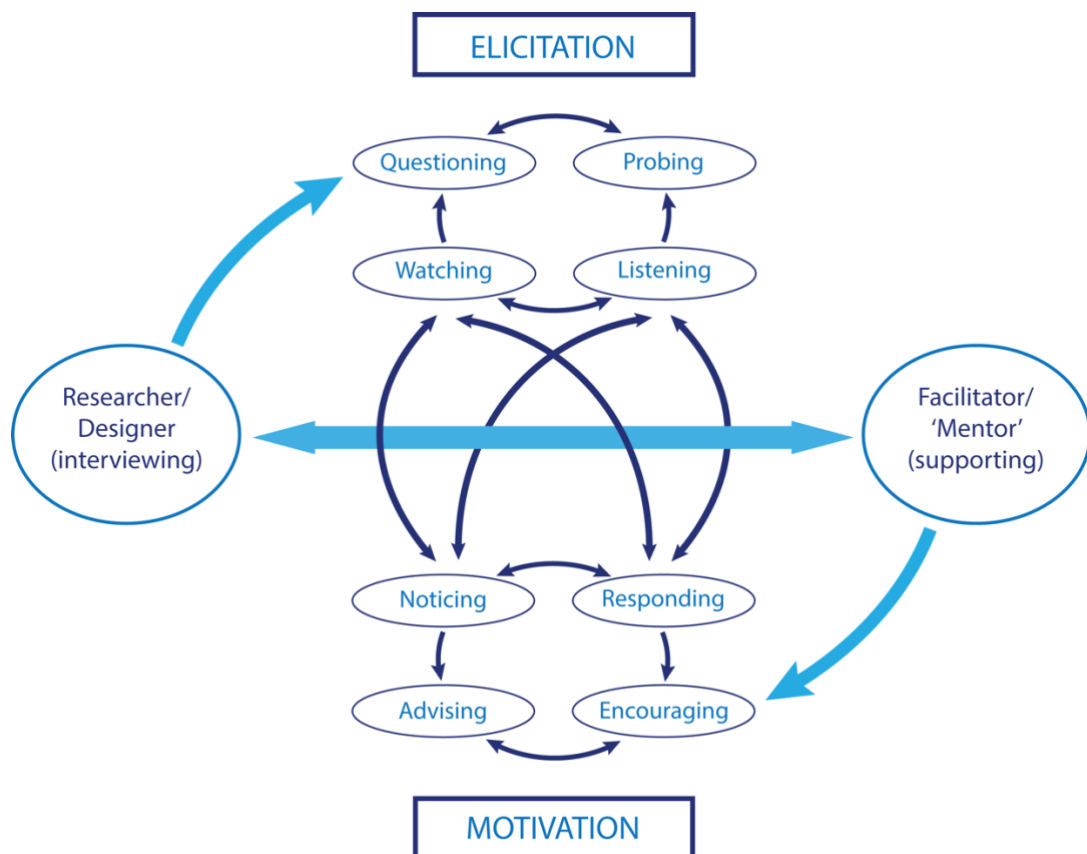


Figure 9 - Diagram of dynamics of ViEW encounter (researcher role).

Project co-design

The remote methods adopted for this research, initially as a substitute for a workshop-based methodology, allowed participants' sewing practices to be seen in situ (i.e. within the home). The one-to-one nature of the ViEW encounters in Phase II precluded the more social aspects of learning that one-to-many workshops are designed to facilitate, and amplified the presence of the researcher to some extent (Harrison & Ogden 2020). However, meeting with participants one-to-one also enabled the project to follow multiple paths, based on participants' individual experiences and interests. The participants, having been selected in part for their intrinsic motivations for wanting to learn to sew, all had ideas about what they wanted to do next. As the aim of the project was to examine and draw insight from beginners' experiences of learning to sew clothes at home, it made sense to follow the participants' own instincts about the direction they wanted to take and the resources they wanted to use.

Some negotiation took place to ensure the participants' suggested activities involved them doing something different to what they had done before or added to the range of activities and resources encountered in the project as a whole. I also offered advice (not always heeded) to try to ensure the chosen making activities stayed within beginners' scope. Consequently, most of the sewing activities undertaken made use of pre-existing patterns and resources. On a few occasions I introduced alternative sewing activities designed to focus on a particular aspect of a participant's experience (e.g. machine control and fabric handling or the visualisation of translations from two to three dimensions) that had arisen during a ViEW encounter. These activities took the form of short sewing tasks undertaken in addition to, rather than instead of, ongoing garment making activities. In this way, the participants' preferences guided the activities undertaken in the Second and Third Making Periods during Phase II. As a result, participants became both the self-directed learners at the heart of the study and partial co-designers of the study itself.

Interpretation of findings in relation to sustainability

Participants were aware of the sustainability focus of the research but as set out above (see Participant Recruitment) an interest in sustainability was not a requirement for taking part, nor was sustainability an explicit consideration in the choice of materials or activities undertaken in Phase II. The decision not to foreground sustainability in the selection of participant or the choice of activity was taken to ensure the study focused on the experiences of beginner sewists and not on what beginner sewists felt they 'should' do in order to 'be sustainable'. Sustainability had not been explicitly mentioned in the call for participants. However, the routes via which the call was circulated may have increased the likelihood of attracting participants with some interest or awareness of sustainability issues. Any such interest or awareness may or may not have factored in participants' desires to learn to sew or the activities they chose to engage in. The interpretation of research findings in relation to sustainability issues is therefore primarily mine.

Participants' experiences of the research

All the participants in this study made wearable garments in the course of the project. It took patience, determination, courage and creativity to bring these completed garments into being and participants were generous in sharing the highs and lows of their experiences. The participants mostly took well to recording their sewing activities, although Rasa and Wendy both reflected that the filming aspect had made sewing a bit more fiddly or daunting at the outset. Steph preferred to record more on film and less in writing. Jenny wrote more than she recorded in film clips. The other three participants (Rasa, Wendy and Sophie) recorded in written journals and on video more or less as I had requested in the introductory workshop and guides provided (Appendices 7a, 7b).

Rasa and Wendy both said they found the structure of the research project to be a helpful additional motivation to sew. For other participants being involved in the project may have added pressure that was less helpful. Jenny had the most difficulty finding time for sewing alongside the demands of her working life and had not been able to do any sewing in the Third Making Period. Steph, a self-employed hairdresser who felt she always learnt best through being shown how to do things, found it daunting to try to learn sewing for herself from a combination of pattern instructions and the online content available to her. She had also worried early on about whether she would be able to fit the project activities into a busy work and family life, but still reflected at the end of the project that she was glad to have been 'picked' to participate (see Section 8.3).

4.10 Methods conclusion

The remote methods used in this study were initially chosen as a substitute for workshop-based methods. The use of journals and video clips achieved 'as near present as possible' insight into the experiences of sewing beginners. The video clips enabled participants' sewing practices to be seen in situ (i.e. within the home) which, when combined with the ViEW encounters, gave presence to materials and materialities of learning to sew clothes at home. As the approach evolved over the course of the project, the use of combined journaling and video elicitation methods

proved effective in elucidating contemporary sewing practices, which are often themselves partly digitally mediated.

This research generates insight into the messy, hybrid (on- and offline) experiences of people learning to sew clothes at home using pre-existing resources. The methods used gave the research participants a role in shaping the study. By making practices undertaken within the home visible, the research opens these practices up to further examination. In doing so, the research offers insights relating to the design (or otherwise) of contemporary sewing resources, the positioning of home sewing as a sustainable practice in its own right, and as a 'sustain-ability' when viewed in the wider context of fashion sustainability. Through this study, I do not claim to provide a systematic or comprehensive account of 'the beginner sewist's experience' from which generalisations may be drawn. Instead, I offer an in-depth account of the varied experience of a small number of beginner sewists, which are used illustratively to think with in a generative way. As demonstrated above, I have tried throughout the research design, data generation, transcription, coding, analysis and writing phases of this research to be cognizant and open about my part in the research process and the interpretative methods used.

CHAPTER 5 – LEARNING TO SEW CLOTHES FOR YOURSELF

This chapter will set the scene for the three thematic chapters that follow by providing an introduction to how people who are interested in sewing their own clothes are learning to sew in the UK today. The chapter is based on Phase I interviews with an ethnically diverse group of five women (Thandi, Elly, Hope, Alison and Rebecca) and two men (Adam and Krish) all aged between 25 and 43, who identified themselves as having sewn clothes for themselves for between three months and two years.

5.1 Learning to sew – at home, school and elsewhere

The amateur sewists whose experiences inform this chapter had mostly decided to start learning to make clothes for themselves as adults with little prior sewing experience. This experience is consistent with a discontinuity in the passing on of clothes making skills between generations at home and at school since the 1980s, as identified in Section 3.4. The interviewees in this study were more likely to have been inspired to sew by seeing others making clothes online or on TV than they were from anything they had learnt in school or at home.

Sewing at home and in school

Although several of the interviewees had grown up in homes where some costume or clothes sewing occurred, very few sewing skills had been learnt within the home. For example, Alison had made a couple of items of clothing alongside her mother as a teenager, 25 years before deciding to relearn to make clothes for herself as an adult, and Hope had dabbled with some clothes upcycling/repurposing projects in her late teens. Where interviewees talked about seeing others sewing at home while growing up, this was always with reference to female relatives: grandmothers, mothers or sisters.

Experiences of sewing in school were also minimal. If sewing skills were encountered in school at all, these experiences were relayed as short-lived and unmemorable. As with the sewists in Martindale's (2017) study and those of a previous generation mentioned in Burman (1999), the way sewing skills have been taught in schools seems

to attract ambivalence at best. Some of the interviewees had been taught limited sewing skills in the first couple of years of secondary school but teaching in Design & Technology was angled more towards design rather than making skills.

I remember making a cushion on the sewing machine...but there wasn't a teacher, so we couldn't do it for GCSE. I would have had the option been there. So we had just a couple of years, years 7 & 8, and then kind of forgot about it.

Hope

I think at school there was, kind of, textiles that I did until I was about fourteen, but didn't have too much of an interest there. As far as I'm aware, we did use sewing machines ... But I remember it was mainly about not getting your school tie stuck into your sewing. It wasn't anything particularly ... and lots of mood boards and, yeah, but I really don't remember much about it, or what we made at all, if anything. *Rebecca*

Elly described having tried to make a prom dress by copying an existing garment as part of a GCSE Art project, despite having no access to a sewing machine at school, which she described as 'a disaster'. In general, the interviewees' stories reflect a lack of specialist textile teaching and persistent gendered perceptions of who fashion and textile learning is appropriate for (see Section 5.6).

Sewing classes

Three interviewees had attended some sewing classes before starting to learn to sew at home. Only Adam, who had been regularly attending a dressmaking class at his local Further Education college prior to the Covid-19 lockdown, described this as a notably positive experience. The class Adam was attending had introduced sewing basics in the first session and proceeded with the tutor offering support for course participants to pursue their own individual sewing projects. In contrast, Hope had once attended a dressmaking course in which the tutor had required beginners to seek approval at each small step before proceeding to the next. Hope had been unable to complete a simple skirt over the 8-week course and described the experience as 'disheartening'

and ‘off-putting’. Alison had also attended a monthly class for a while but, having chosen to work with an asymmetric skirt pattern which required adjustment, had not progressed far beyond altering the pattern. Both Hope and Alison waited some years (over a decade in Hope’s case) before deciding to teach themselves to sew at home, having been inspired by seeing other people sewing online.

5.2 Motivations for learning to sew

Hands-on skills and creativity

The desire to do something hands-on and creative, often in contrast to non-creative, desk-based work, chimes with experiences relayed by Twigger Holroyd (2017) and with Martindale’s (2017) study in which sewing was seen as a route to personal fulfilment not achieved through other aspects of life. Rebecca and Hope both enjoyed having projects to keep them busy in their spare time; Adam and Alison both found sewing to be a way to unwind from high pressured jobs.

I think what it was having a job that was quite paper-based and desk-bound and non-creative, in the sense of doing something with your hands, and it's quite high pressured as well, and then I just found that sewing was a complete escape from that really. *Alison*

Elly was explicitly attracted to the idea of learning a new skill that she might pass down or pass on to others.

And, as well as, to kind of have a skill that I could possibly pass down to other people, pass on to other people. But, yeah, just having a skill. Being able to make something with my hands and to wear it and show it off, to be like ‘I've made this’. *Elly*

Clothes that suit and fit me

The opportunity to have better-fitting or more individual clothes was amongst the motivations that the interviewees expressed for wanting to sew. This finding also

chimes with Martindale's study which highlights control over appearance as a motivation for sewing.

I think I've always been interested in clothes and how they are made and stuff....And I kind of just like having individual, sort of ... I know nothing's really individual, but as much as it can be, if you make your own clothes then it's your own personal choice isn't it really. *Adam*

It [learning to sew] seems like it might be a good way to get clothes that fit me rather than ... Everything that is ready-to-wear, I am not the fit model for them. For any of them. *Thandi*

Krish was motivated by the prospect of having affordable clothes, made from better quality materials than the ready-to-wear market offered him.

Multiple perspectives on sustainability

Awareness of clothing sustainability issues, including the ethics of clothing production, was a common concern for the interviewees, most of whom touched on aspects of sustainability during their interview. Thandi felt that many people, like her, became interested in sewing their own clothes from a sustainability perspective. Where sustainability and/or ethics were explicitly expressed as motivations for learning to sew, this tended to link to dissatisfaction with aspects of the current fashion system and was often just one amongst several reasons for wanting to sew clothes.

Obviously I know the background of how bad the clothing industry can be in terms of working conditions, sourcing material, the whole supply chain and everything. There was always an intention for me to really learn how clothes are constructed and what goes into so many techniques ... I think there's still a lot I need to learn but that was one of the main reasons I went into it. *Rebecca*

Some interviewees were motivated to sew by a desire to either know where materials had come from or how their clothes had been made.

I think I wanted to know where my clothes were coming from and to be able to know exactly what my clothes are made of ... During Uni I did modules on fashion. I did Human Geography as my degree and I did modules on fashion. And I guess, my mum, whenever we go shopping we always look in charity shops at the stuff that's been made in the UK and I think that has rubbed off on me. And knowing that my stuff is made, I guess, ethically is very important, and sustainably is really important. *Elly*

So buying something that hasn't travelled as far is quite good. But also, I suppose, there's a lot of fast, cheap fashion. There's a cost somewhere isn't there, to do with how it's been made or who's made it as well, so being conscious about knowing that, you know. *Adam*

Hope saw sewing as a route away from fast fashion consumption:

And, also, because I like clothes, I can't help but be aware of the issues around things like fast fashion and sustainability. So, I was thinking I've had a sewing machine for years, and actually starting seeing people on Instagram that were making things themselves, and I just thought I have the tools, maybe I should give this a go. Because I love shopping in Primark but I know how bad it is, so I really wanted to try and move away from that

Some interviewees discussed the material waste associated with home sewing. Waste minimisation or increased material efficiency are familiar concepts in discussion around the sustainability (or otherwise) of industrially produced clothing – where an average of 15% of fabric goes to waste (McQuillan & Rissanen 2016). Designer and *Sewing Bee* presenter Patrick Grant has suggested that waste *per item* may be twice as high for homemade clothing, and some of the interviewees expressed feelings of guilt associated with this waste.

There's a lot of guilt associated with how much waste there is, which I think probably when compared to a high street maker is not as much but when

you've made a toile [test] garment and you just know that it's not wearable, that feels incredibly wasteful. *Thandi*

Some sewing pattern designers and parts of the online community that supports home sewists focus on the minimisation of waste through zero waste design (e.g. Zero Waste Design Collective¹⁴). Elly mentioned that she was not drawn to the look of the zero waste patterns she has encountered. Although she was aware of the potential waste of fabric arising from her sewing practice, she justified this within the context of her learning.

I think I've just been so focused on the making of the clothes, that the waste has been a niggle but I've not actually done anything about it yet...At the moment I justify it by saying that I am learning and that they [test garments] are not wasted, they're just me practising and learning and getting better. *Elly*

Several of the interviewees had instigated projects to reduce waste or repurpose offcuts. Thandi and Adam had both gone out of their way to source some roll-end fabrics for their sewing activities. Rebecca had tried to avoid using new fabrics for her first garments by using old duvet covers instead. Both Thandi and Elly had plans to make use of fabric left over from their sewing, and were considering learning to quilt.

5.3 Sewing patterns and instructions

When asked about the sewing resources they used for making clothes, the interviewees often made a distinction between indie and commercial patterns. I will use the terms 'indie' and 'commercial' to distinguish between the two, while acknowledging that 'indie' patterns are also largely the product of commercial ventures and that neither category – indie or commercial – is homogenous.

¹⁴ ZWDC is an international collective (founded by Cassandra Belanger, Holly McQuillan and Danielle Elsener), working at the intersection of education, practice and industry to address textile waste through design, practice and community - <https://www.zerowastedesignonline.com/>.

Indie patterns

As was the case in Martindale's (2017) study, the interviewees generally spoke favourably of indie patterns when compared to commercial patterns, especially for beginners. They valued indie patterns for their more contemporary style and perceived accessibility. Indie patterns were seen as being 'more attractive' and 'more fashionable', and the instructions 'clearer', 'easier to follow' and 'more geared towards beginners' than patterns from the commercial pattern brands (Figures 10 & 12).

I've found that a lot of the instructions and the books and things like that are now so accessible. It's quite different from some of the difficult to read, old-fashioned patterns and instructions, that kind of assumed a certain degree of experience already ... Not that there's anything wrong with either method, it's just quite accessible, as I say, I think it makes you think that you can do it.

Alison

I think the surge in independent pattern companies ... I don't know when this happened, when they all started ... but I think that's really the main thing that has made sewing a lot more accessible, for me at least. And, kind of, friendlier and less daunting. *Hope*



Figure 10 - Examples of three indie (left) and three commercial patterns (right).



Figure 11 - Commercial Simplicity 1563 multi-garment pattern from 2013. Illustrated envelope (top left), instruction sheet (bottom left) and tissue paper pattern (right).

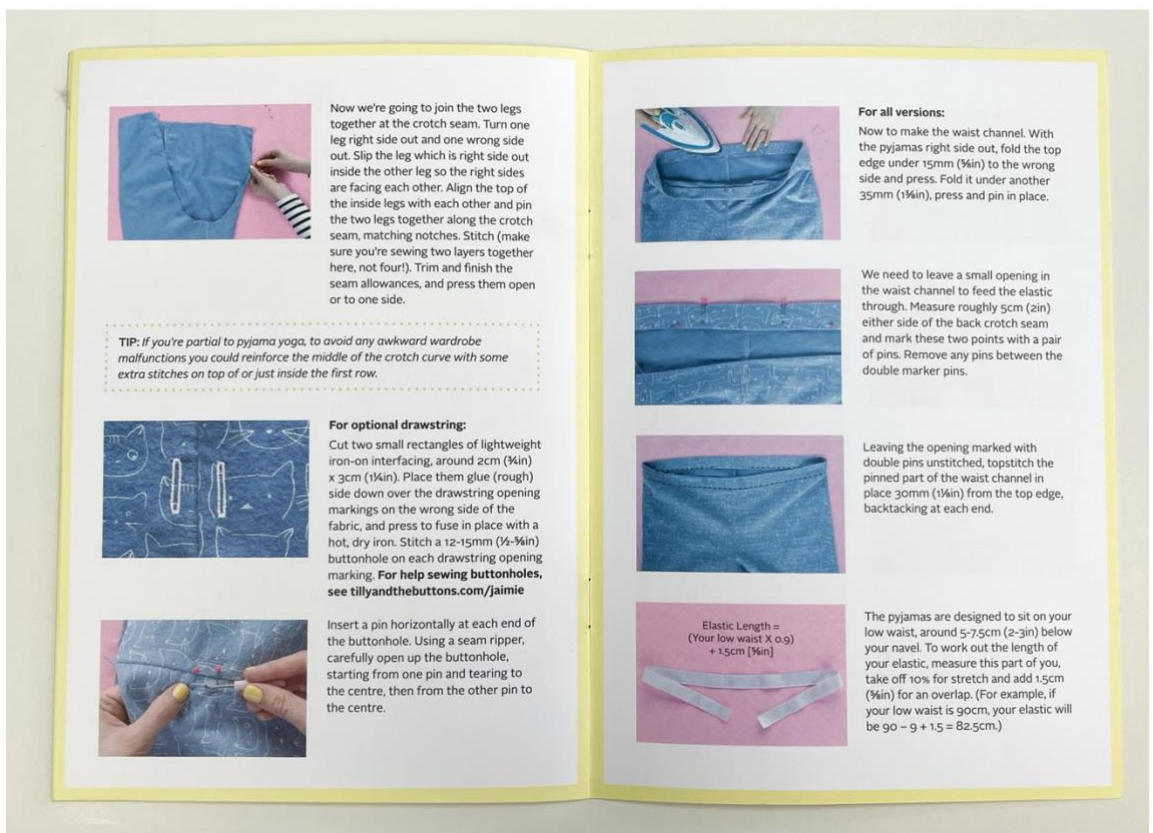
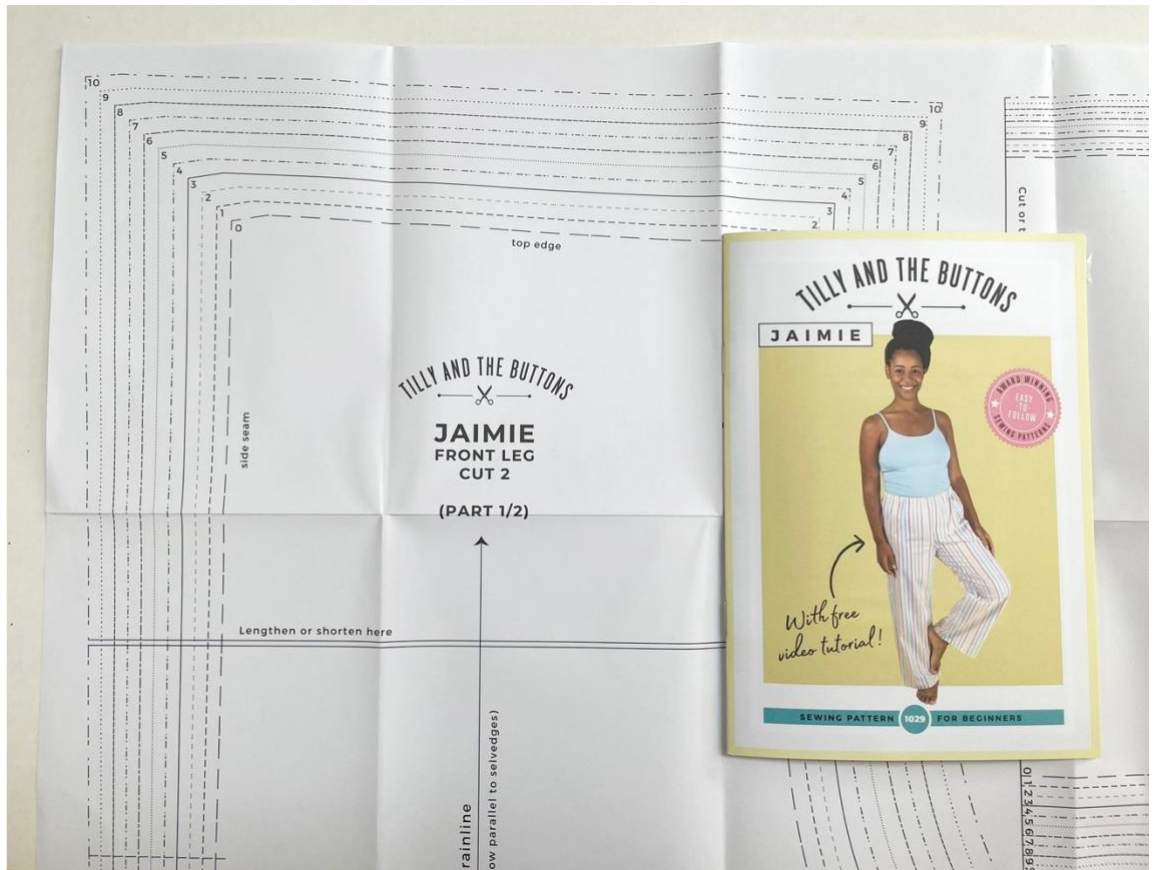


Figure 12 - Indie pattern, Tilly and the Buttons 'Jaimie' pyjama trouser from 2020. Pattern sheet and cover image (top), photo-illustrated instruction booklet (bottom).

The Tilly and the Buttons brand of indie patterns received several mentions for being particularly ‘user friendly’. When asked why Tilly and the Buttons patterns were particularly attractive, Hope expressed a number of reasons:

I think, something about the way that everything is explained. So there's often no knowledge assumed, particularly in those beginners' patterns. So having gone on a course, where we had to do tailor's tacks and everything was over complicated, this ... I like them because there are always a few different ways of doing something, and it's whatever works for you. And it's just presented in a manner that's quite friendly. So, ‘don't worry if you get this wrong’, ‘this is one way of doing it’. I like that the ability is very clear too. So this is a ‘beginners’ pattern’ and this is for ‘confident beginners’. Yeah, and there's lots of clear guidance about what fabric to use as well. *Hope*

The tone and content of indie patterns and their instructions were viewed as being helpful to beginners, offering encouragement and reassurance. Indie pattern makers were seen as being there to teach you *how to* do it rather than just *what to* do. The use of photographs in pattern instructions was another appeal of indie patterns, making them more attractive than commercial brands that tend to use drawn illustrations to accompany their written instructions (Figure 13). In general, indie patterns were considered to give sewing instructions a friendlier and more approachable appearance. Interviewees also appreciated the additional online resources provided by the indie pattern brands, including sewalongs, pattern blogs and posts on social media linked by searchable hashtags for specific patterns (see Section 5.4 below).

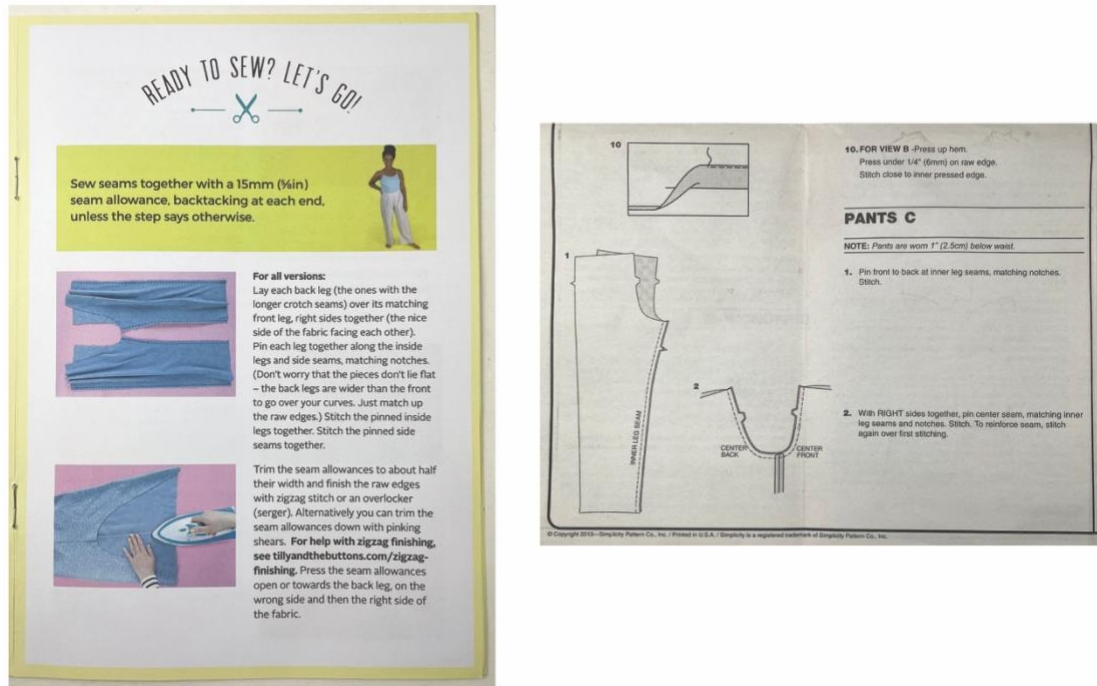


Figure 13 - Different styles of pattern instruction, (a) Indie pattern, Tilly and the Buttons 'Jamie' pyjama bottoms, with photo illustrations (b) Commercial pattern, Simplicity K1620, with drawn illustrations.

The availability of indie patterns as downloadable PDFs was considered to be a significant positive by the interviewees. These files are either printed out on standard A4 paper as tiles that must then be taped together to form the full pattern, or sent to a copy shop for large-format printing. The established indie brands (e.g. Tilly and the Buttons) provide many of their patterns in both pre-printed format and as PDF files. Some less-established brands provide patterns as PDF files only. PDF patterns were seen as being more versatile than commercial patterns, as they could be printed multiple times and sometimes in single sizes, allowing for remakes in different sizes without the extra step of tracing off a particular size.

I think with digital patterns they are so flexible ... I just think if I had a pattern that was posted to me it would feel like a product, it would feel precious, whereas, [with the pdf] I can just print it again. *Thandi*

PDFs were also seen as easier to access during lockdown and cheaper to obtain, where there were postage costs to consider for the pre-printed patterns. On the negative

side, piecing PDF patterns together at home was generally perceived as daunting, time-consuming and otherwise undesirable.

I've bought the pdfs and had them printed. But since ... I've done two that you print off yourself. I hate doing it, but since lockdown I've done quite a few.

Hope

It's a downloadable pattern which I thought 'yuck' I've got to put it together.

But then it's really short as well because it's only a small pattern. *Alison*

The time it took to put together the pdf print out was probably about two or three hours in the end. It was so long. And it didn't really ... there was no sense of satisfaction at the end, that you'd made something. It was like 'great, so NOW I can start'. *Elly*

Commercial patterns

In contrast to indie patterns, commercial patterns were seen by several of the interviewees as being more 'difficult to read', including more 'technical language' and assuming 'a certain degree of experience' or 'higher level of skill'. Some interviewees saw commercial patterns as 'more dated' and referred to them variously as 'old', 'old-style' or 'old-school'. Elly identified a particular issue with sizing and fit of commercial patterns:

Buying patterns from like Butterick and Vogue are great but I think they have something like comfort fit, so the size that you make ends up being bigger than what you are. *Elly*

It may be that the styles and degree of ease included in commercial pattern ranges assume greater knowledge of fitting techniques than indie patterns, which often feature styles with an intentionally loose, and so less exacting, fit. Comparisons were also made between the material qualities of commercial versus indie patterns. Where

indie patterns tend to be printed on sturdier paper, commercial patterns, printed on tissue paper, were seen as both ‘fiddly’ to handle and less robust.

Although some interviewees expressed an explicit preference for indie patterns, and Thandi had experience only of this style of pattern, there was also acknowledgement that learning to understand patterns and instructions, of any kind, was partly about learning a language, and that once you were familiar with this language, the whole process became easier.

But, it's just another language when you first start. I am sure if I looked at that same ... those same instructions now it would be so easy. But even with the picture guides in the book – which again, looking back, would be very very simple – it was just like ‘what do they mean!’ on this. And which bits go together? And what are notches? And what ... I don't have an overlocker, so how do I finish my garment so that it still looks tidy? *Rebecca*

I think it's not entirely fair to say the old-style patterns are difficult to read etcetera, and I think it's, you know, when you break it down into the steps, the skills are sort of comparable. There's not drastically new ways of doing things maybe with the new patterns but the designs, I suppose, are more attractive and that gives you motivation to do them. *Alison*

There's a language, and once you've got that then it's easy and it's fine and you're like ‘oh, great, that goes through there and voila!’ *Elly*

5.4 Sewing support

In addition to sewing patterns and instructions, an enormous amount of sewing-related content is available online. Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube were all mentioned by the interviewees as sources of inspiration, information and instruction.

Inspiration

The online sewing community is seen as large and supportive, which many of the interviewees found both useful and inspiring.

I would say for almost everything you're making, if you can't find a video or a tutorial, then in the Facebook group someone has probably made it, or can help, or something like that. So, I would say the range of material is quite incredible. *Alison*

I'm completely online and I think a lot of people learn that way now. It's a massive community. *Thandi*

I've found the Facebook community so nice ... everyone has that same interest and although my partner and my friends don't really understand what this whole world is, I think it is nice to have that community of people. *Rebecca*

Instagram seemed particularly influential amongst the women in this study, all of whom mentioned it at some point. Some were inspired to start sewing after seeing others doing so on Instagram or credited the platform as a source of inspiration for some of the things that they had made or planned to make in future.

I guess I am quite swayed by the Instagram and Pinterest social media apps and the smaller companies do very well at marketing themselves on there and so I think I am swayed more to them because of that. *Elly*

Information

Instagram, Facebook and Pinterest are all places that interviewees went to get sewing ideas, research the garments they planned to make or seek information about a prospective project, such as its perceived level of difficulty. The option to search social media content using hashtags to find other sewists who have used a particular pattern was seen as a useful feature. Interviewees used hashtags to glean information about

the fabrics others had used and alterations they had made or to get an impression of the fit of a particular garment on different body shapes.

So what I usually do ... say I wanted a dress pattern, I follow quite a range of people on Instagram that are like sewing Instagram accounts and I will follow hashtags. So I will find all the dresses that are similar, because there is usually a lot ... and I'll follow the hashtag, which means I can see all the people who have made it. I'll try to find people who are around my size and see how it looks on them. Then I'll have a look at the resources that go with the pattern online. So, does it have a sewalong? Does it have hacks? And can I get more than one garment out of it. So is there a way of making it into a top? Is there way of altering it into a skirt? *Thandi*

Instruction

Instruction in the form of blogs, videos and sewalongs were all used by interviewees to support their learning. Some said they found sewalongs (video of an item being made step-by-step) for a specific pattern particularly useful and sought these out when choosing what to make.

I like indie patterns and a lot of them have sewalongs for when they come out. So the last few patterns that I have bought I know definitely have sewalongs and I also know that they have hacks and adjustments. *Thandi*

Others dipped in and out of these resources as they felt they needed to.

So I've made a couple of patterns at not quite the same time ... As she [Lisa Comfort, Sew Over It] has been doing the patterns online, I've been following them, you know, not quite live, because I've just been pausing as I go on.

Rebecca

I've not used a sewalong from start to finish. I think what I do is I come across something I don't know what I am doing and I Google that particular step. So,

like, how to insert an invisible zip, I'll look that up rather than a, kind of, all the way through a whole garment. *Elly*

The interviewees often turned to online video content, particularly YouTube, when wanting to understand a particular technique.

There's some YouTube things as well, because sometimes it's really ... like you can read something in a book but it doesn't always describe it as easily ... or you can read on a pattern or something and it doesn't describe it well as being able to see someone actually go through that process. So, I've used various things depending on what I was doing really. *Adam*

Hands-on support

Only Adam and Krish had regular contact 'in real life' with anyone else who sewed. Before lockdown, Adam had regular contact with the tutor on the weekly course he was attending. Krish's wife, who also sews, had been able to help him set up his machine and get started. Amongst the women in this study, Elly and Rebecca both had mothers who they could ask for advice, although for Rebecca this contact had been entirely via Facetime as she had only started learning to sew during lockdown. Elly, who had been staying with her parents during lockdown, indicated that she was more likely to show her mum what she had made when she had finished it than she was to ask her for help. Alison spoke about a local shop where she had previously been able to ask questions. However, having no regular contact with friends who sewed, these beginners were doing a great deal of their learning on their own at home with the help of the internet. The availability of online resources, particularly associated with indie patterns, plus the user-generated social media content they give rise to (see above), all served to make sewing more attractive and/or accessible to these sewing beginners.

5.5 Sewing highs and lows

The expectations of sewing that the interviewees had before they started varied from the overly optimistic to the trepidatious. For some the process was more complicated than expected; for others, the resolution of a first garment was easier and more

successful than they had imagined it would be. Some of the interviewees reported having taken on some surprisingly ambitious projects. Thick, napped and stretch fabrics, which require adjustments to machine setup and particular attention to fabric handling or orientation, had all been used by these beginners for first projects. Most had produced a wearable garment early on, if not on their first attempt, and had continued to improve their sewing skills.

Learning new skills and working things out

Sewing was seen by the interviewees as a rewarding hobby which gave them something physical to show for the time they had devoted to it and plenty of scope for learning new skills and techniques.

There's a lot of exciting things and if you layer all that together, it's a very rewarding hobby because you can go off in different directions and explore different techniques but still within the umbrella of sewing. *Alison*

When the interviewees described their early experiences of learning to sew, much of what they talked about was a process of trial and error – of working things out, understanding construction, unpicking seams and in some cases making the same garment several times before getting it right. Though this was a source of frustration at times, it was also recognised as part of the learning process and sometimes part of its reward.

I think the figuring out and the working out of the pattern is a process of learning. I think I do really well once I've sewn something together and realised it's not right and have to unpick it. So, I know not to do that next time. I think, rather than someone showing me the right way from the start, the kind of ... getting it wrong really helps me. *Elly*

Despite some of the frustrations they had experienced, these beginners remained interested in learning new skills and working with materials they had not previously used.

Having something 'I made'

Amongst the beginner sewists in this study, being able to make and take pride in items of clothing they had made was seen as a significant positive.

Yeah, I think the first few things I've made have been ... I've worn them quite a lot since and that's the biggest thing. I was so pleased with that first dress that I made. I went and met some friends in the afternoon that I'd finished it and I wore it and I was like 'guess what everyone, I made this!'. In a way I was more proud of having done that than having just submitted my PhD, because I think it was just something that was so immediate, and the PhD had just been dragging on for years. I was always going to get there and submit that but this was just something I'd made. *Hope*

In addition to the satisfaction of having made something, the reaction of others was often also mentioned as a rewarding aspect of sewing clothes for yourself.

I actually wore a top yesterday that I finished on the weekend and it was so lovely to, kind of ... one of my family members who I saw yesterday said 'I love that top' and I was like 'I made it myself'. And that's the first time I've had that and I know that that's something that a lot of people have. It's the satisfaction of knowing you've made it yourself. *Rebecca*

Whether they wanted people to know an outfit was homemade or took pleasure in their garments 'passing' without comment, these beginner sewists gained pleasure and satisfaction from being able to have clothes that were individual to them – reflecting a sense of agency achieved through personal style (Tulloch 2020) highlighted in Section 3.5. All the interviewees had plans for skills they wished to learn or garments they wanted to make. T-shirts, jeans, outerwear and underwear were all mentioned by the interviewees as items they had made or aspired to make in the near future and some of the interviewees aspired to wardrobes full of homemade items.

Being frustrated when things go wrong

In addition to the many rewards of sewing, the interviewees also touched on some of the less enjoyable aspects of learning to sew. These included being annoyed or frustrated when wrangling with a reluctant sewing machine, putting the parts of a garment together incorrectly or making clothes that did not fit – reflecting the desire for positive outcomes from clothes making activities (Twigger Holroyd 2014, 2016) highlighted in Section 3.5.

At the beginning ... I just went straight into it and I think that's what fills you with disappointment and sadness and frustration. You spend all this time, and you've bought beautiful fabric, and it doesn't quite work...The most challenging [thing about sewing] is not being disheartened when something you've spent a week making doesn't really fit ... it doesn't look [like] what your drawing is or what the image in your head was going to look like. I think that's possibly the most challenging; getting back and being like, It's fine, I'll make another one, this one will be better. *Elly*

The need to take your time and be patient was mentioned by several interviewees. Adam suggested that sewing was teaching him patience and the need to stop and reflect rather than pressing ahead to complete a task.

I think the challenging bits of it are that it requires quite a lot of patience. So as much as I like getting stuck into something, I also have a bit of a habit of thinking I just want to get something done as well. So it's teaching me a bit about how to leave something alone for a bit and maybe move away from it and come back to it when you feel a bit more in the frame of mind to start working something out really. There's been a couple of things that I think I've probably finished, and they're ok, but they're probably not necessarily how they should have been, you know, something like that. Probably, if I'd just spent a bit more time, I think waited and been a bit more patient and gone through the instructions, it might have been that I could have done them to the way the pattern asked. *Adam*

Space, time and expense

Space, time and expense were the three main limitations on the interviewees' sewing activities. Space was a struggle for many, with the cutting out of fabric often having to take place on the floor. Several interviewees were working from home and sewing in the same space.

Space is a big one, so the desk that I'm sat at the moment is my workspace and I'm sitting next to my sewing machine and it's a small desk. And it's just having space to cut things out as well. That's really hard. So I do it on the floor. I get a bit of a bad back sometimes so that doesn't really help, having to cut things out on the floor. But I know there's not really any way round that. *Hope*

Several interviewees mentioned time as a limitation on their sewing activities. Thandi and Hope mentioned finding time for their sewing during holiday periods. Alison and Adam both spoke about finding time to fit sewing in after work. Thandi and Alison expressed some frustration with the time that sewing preparation (setting up space, preparing fabric) took. Several interviewees also mentioned the expense involved in learning to sew, with the cost of fabric being the main concern.

One of the things is the cost element as well, because for beginners it can be quite expensive. If you buy fabric and bits and pieces, it's not a cheap hobby I would say anymore. *Alison*

The costs involved in sewing were more of a concern for some than for others but were also linked to concerns about not wanting to waste fabric and being frustrated when things did not work out.

5.6 Sewing as a gendered skill

The fact that sewing is a highly gendered skill is evident in the differing experiences of the men and women involved in these Phase I interviews. Although it has always been the case that it is not only women who sew, those not identifying as women are far less visible in the sewing spaces of the internet and far less well catered for in terms of

offline sewing resources (e.g. patterns and books). There are many cultural reasons for this, including the divisions that are drawn between women's and men's clothes and the associated differentiation between dressmaking and tailoring as sewing practices, with the latter requiring what are arguably more complex sewing skills. Wendy Ward's *Sewing Basics for Every Body* (2020) is a notable exception in pitching basic clothes sewing skills in a gender-neutral way. While there are now several sewing pattern brands that specialise in men's clothing patterns (e.g. Thread Theory, Wardrobe by Me), it still appears from online pattern reviews that the majority of people sewing these garments are women sewing for the men in their lives. Despite this heavily skewed picture, it is not only women who are interested in sewing clothes.

Both the men interviewed for this study recalled having had some interest in clothes sewing when they were younger but had only decided to take it up in their thirties. Neither of them knew any other men who sewed. Unlike most of the women in this study both men did, however, have regular contact with someone more experienced at sewing. Krish, whose wife also sewed, saw sewing as an interesting hobby to be involved in together. Adam had decided to 'bite the bullet and go to an evening class' ten months before being interviewed for this project. The gendered nature of sewing was reflected in the stories that both men told about their sewing activities. Krish described his mum expressing some scepticism about his choice of a such a feminised hobby before he started, although she appeared to have been won over after seeing the end results. It subsequently transpired that Krish's dad had at one time sewn sari blouses for his mum back in the 1970s. Krish framed his dad's sewing, which he'd previously known nothing about, as 'just on the list of things he did, alongside making speaker cabinets' in a time when 'people just were a bit more hands-on and crafted more as a matter of necessity or course.' Adam, who was attending a dressmaking evening course, was aware that the language around sewing might be off-putting to others.

It's a dressmaking course. So, I think I'm the only man whose been on the course since September. I suppose dressmaking in some ways might put people off but it's a kind of 'learn to sew' dressmaking course. *Adam*

Adam had welcomed the social aspect of being on the course with a wider group of people who were different from him. Krish, on the other hand, was uncomfortable with the idea of attending sewing classes, despite having access to a local workshop that he knew men sometimes attended:

I don't want to go into a sewing class full of women and like be the kind of sewing guy [laughs]. Because I know Raystitch have got classes and guys go to them and all the rest of it but there's an element of it where it's just like I don't want to encroach on that environment a bit, maybe. But also I don't want to draw attention to myself and stand out, like 'hi, I'm this guy that sews' like 'look at me'. *Krish*

Adam picked up on amateur sewing being perceived as a domestic and therefore female activity.

It's strange isn't it, because you look on *Sewing Bee* and there was a few men wasn't there. I think there was three men this time. So, like you said, they must be out there. There must be people out there sewing but it's how they're connected or what their connections are that's not so obvious ... In some ways it's similar to cooking. There's a kind of domestic sewing and a kind of professional sewing ... there's kind of a domestic sewing that's more focused on women, even though it shouldn't be, and then there's this kind ... what seems to be the high end stuff, that's tailors isn't it. *Adam*

Both men reflected on their difficulty in finding patterns that they liked. Thread Theory, Wardrobe by Me and Merchant & Mills were the three main indie companies mentioned for having men's pattern designs. Adam had also used patterns from Burda and a US-based outdoor wear pattern company, Green Pepper, which he had sourced via a German supplier. Krish was planning to make something using some patterns his wife found in a men's issue of the Belgian magazine, *La Maison Victor*. Krish observed that the range of style variations in men's clothing in general was more limited than that available to women, suggesting that his difficulty in sourcing patterns for

garments he was interested in making may not be solely a result of gender bias in home sewing resources.

I've found finding patterns really hard. I think that is one thing that, as a guy trying to sew, you basically have like ... there's a t-shirt pattern and there's a jumper pattern and actually trying to find stuff is really difficult. I look at the kind of range of clothes that you can make, or that my wife makes, or the range of patterns that are available and I feel a bit like 'wow'. It just feels like it's a barrier, because it's much easier to buy a t-shirt, just a normal fitted t-shirt. It's much easier than making it and if you're not making something unique then what's the driver to make it, I guess. *Krish*

For Adam the search for pattern styles that he liked and wanted to wear had encouraged him to think about learning to draft his own.

I think men's patterns are quite limited, so I think being able to draw out my own patterns would be quite useful really....Yeah, so I think a lot of the patterns that are around for men tend to be a bit old fashioned looking. So I think they are limited in that sense. The trousers I made were a Burda pattern. They've got a line called Burda Young which is kind of, like, they make slimmer trousers and stuff like that....But, yeah, it seems to be very limited really. So of the trousers, I've made a few of the same pattern and I'd just like to be able to make my own kind of shapes and stuff. Do something that fits me better. *Adam*

Just as the availability of men's patterns is limited, so is the social media and online content related to the making of these garments. While this lack of targeted content is not necessarily a problem in terms of picking up technical skills, it is more difficult to find online tutorials or sewalongs relating to a specific garment.

The experiences of men who sew clothes for themselves was not further pursued in this project due to the limited number of prospective male participants putting themselves forward for Phase II. Expanding the focus of research into sewing practices,

beyond their generally narrow focus on women, would be a fascinating and valuable area for future research.

5.7 Conclusion

These findings suggest that in contemporary UK culture, common experiences of learning to sew clothes involve a hybrid mix of on- and offline resources, often used by people sewing at home alone. The experiences of these interviewees, who were mostly learning to sew as adult beginners, are indicative of the decline in sewing culture and the generation or so who learnt few sewing skills at school or elsewhere as a consequence (Bain 2016, Burman 1999). These amateur sewists' motivations for sewing – to be more creative, learn a new skill or create better-fitting or more individual clothes – are consistent with the theme of personal fulfilment identified by Martindale (2017) and Schofield-Tomschin (1999). Contrary to these more consumer focused studies, concerns relating to issues of sustainability – variously associated with material consumption, waste, garment provenance and issues of social justice – are also found to be a common motivating factor for home sewing, as Bain's (2016) research of popular sewing blogs also identified.

A new generation of sewing patterns and online resources have helped to make learning to sew clothes at home alone appear attractive and accessible. Social media provides inspiration for sewing and for what is sewn, particularly amongst the women interviewed. In contrast, the limited range of on- and offline patterns and resources and associated social media content and marketing aimed at men represents the continuation of a sewing culture that is highly gendered (Burman 1999) and is reflected in experiences of learning to sew that differed along gender lines. The two men who were interviewed had more access to, and more readily acknowledged, the hands-on support they had in starting to sew. The five women interviewed appeared to be more reliant and more influenced by what they found online. For this group of beginner sewists, two-way communication with other experienced sewists, either in real life or within online sewing communities, appears to have been limited.

The findings in this chapter helped to inform the design of research Phase II. As beginners mostly seemed to have found the resources they felt they needed from amongst the multitudinous on- and offline options already available to them, the research in Phase II focused more on participants' embodied experiences of learning to sew, rather than – as had earlier been envisaged – on resource design. Participants in Phase II were guided towards what to look for in a beginners' pattern rather than being steered towards any particular pattern type or brand. Although some of the Phase I interviewees expressed a preference for indie over commercial patterns, both types had been used in their early experiences of sewing, so offering Phase II participants a similarly open choice appeared to be both appropriate and authentic. As the Phase I interviewees had all shown some awareness and consideration of sustainability issues related to their clothes-sewing practices – despite this not being their primary motivation – I decided that an explicit interest in clothing sustainability need *not* be a selection criteria for Phase II participants.

The findings from Phases II and III of the research provide a deeper insight into the embodied and material experiences of sewing beginners which are discussed in Chapters 6-8. Where the experiences of the Phase I interviewees intersect with topics pursued in more depth in the thematic chapters, the Phase I experiences are woven into the discussions.

CHAPTER 6 – CRAFT LEARNING & EMOTION

6.1 Introduction to thematic findings chapters

This chapter and the two that follow – Chapter 7 on Wearability and Chapter 8 on Materiality – are based primarily on my thematic analysis of the ViEW encounters conducted during project Phase II. Through the ViEW encounters, and the journal entries and self-recorded video clips that informed them, I built up a rich picture of each participant’s individual experience of learning to sew. The experiences of each participant contribute to the overarching themes of the three findings chapters of this thesis (Chapters 6-8) in different ways. Some experiences were common to all, while others help to highlight a particular aspect of the topics being discussed. The five participants in the Phase II research were:

- Rasa – a 22-year-old Music Business graduate originally from Lithuania, working in retail and describing herself as ‘part of the YouTube generation’.
- Steph – a 33-year-old self-employed hairdresser and mother of two, who was recently given a sewing machine as a present and described it as her ‘new best friend’.
- Wendy – a 41-year-old working in events management, who grew up around sewing but never got round to learning and described herself as having ‘all the gear and no idea’.
- Jenny – a 44-year-old working in advice service management, attracted to sewing as a mindful hobby and a way to reduce fast fashion consumption and have clothes that fit.
- Sophie – a 28-year-old working in public sector commissioning, who wanted to do something creative as a contrast to work and viewed sewing as a useful life skill.

A fuller profile of each participant, their reason for wanting to learn to sew clothes, the approach they took to sewing and the projects they undertook in each Making Period can be found in Appendix 15a-e. Where Phase II participants are quoted their name will be followed by a number or letter in brackets to denote whether the quote originates from one of their ViEW encounters (1-3), the Phase III in-person workshop

(W) or their follow up interview (F) – for example ‘Rasa (1)’ would indicate a quote from Rasa’s first ViEW encounter. Where references are made in text this notation will be abbreviated to ‘(R1)’. Where it is useful to reference the experiences of Phase I interviewees the interviewees’ name will be followed by the letter (I) to distinguish them from the Phase II participants (see Table 8).

Table 8: Guide to data annotation used throughout Chapters 6-9.

Origin of data	Use of data	Annotation Example
Phase I Interview		Thandi (I)
Phase II ViEW Encounter	Quote	Rasa (1), (2) or (3)
	In text reference	(R1), (R2) or (R3)
Phase III In-Person Workshop	Quote	Rasa (W)
	In text reference	(RW)
Phase III Follow-up interview	Quote	Rasa (F)
	In text reference	(RF)

6.2 Chapter introduction

This chapter will address research questions 1 and 2 – how basic sewing and clothes construction skills are learnt at home and what resources help people learn them – based on the experiences of sewing that Rasa, Steph, Wendy, Jenny and Sophie shared with me. After an introduction to the resources used, I will expand on the participants’ experiences of using them to inform their emerging sewing practices. These findings are primarily based on data within the ViEW encounter transcripts where participants expressed particular emotions (e.g. enjoyment, pride, anxiety, frustration) when talking about their sewing experiences. Focusing on the emotions expressed by the participants offers a route to understanding these beginners’ experiences and the support that contemporary sewing resources do and do not offer them. This understanding forms a basis upon which to consider aspects of contemporary sewing culture and resources that may or may not be helpful to beginners as they endeavour to learn to sew clothes for themselves.

6.3 Choosing sewing patterns

Between them, the Phase II participants used a range of online and offline resources – patterns, sewing books, magazines, YouTube videos, blogs and other social media content – to inform their sewing practices. The majority of the patterns used during the project were from indie brands (see Section 5.3). All used indie patterns in the First Making Period, except Rasa who chose to use a commercial (New Look) skirt pattern. Rasa was the only participant not to use an indie pattern during the entire study, being drawn to pattern-free projects from YouTube videos for the Second Making Period and trying to work out a common pattern adjustment using an online tutorial and a commercial pattern in the Third Making Period. Steph was the only participant who tried working with both indie and commercial patterns during the project. Having first made a pinafore dress from an indie (Tilly and the Buttons) pattern, Steph chose commercial (New Look and Butterick) patterns for dresses which she felt were more her style, to use in the Second and Third Making Periods. Like all beginners, Steph experienced some difficulty interpreting the instructions that came with both the indie and commercial patterns she used (see Section 6.5 below). By the time of the in-person workshop, eight months after her third ViEW encounter, Steph had returned to using indie patterns and, like several of the Phase I interviewees, confirmed them to be her pattern preference. When choosing which pattern to use in the Third Making Period Sophie identified two patterns for slip-on dresses – one commercial (Vogue), one indie (Tilly and the Buttons) – that she was interested in making (Figure 14). Having taken a good look at both patterns, Sophie explained why she had chosen to use the Tilly and the Buttons option:

I don't know if it's a really simple thing, but I think sometimes the actual like look of the booklet can make a big difference, just like with the colours and stuff. So the other one was like, I think it was on the tracing paper... Whereas this one was just like ... I don't know if it felt a bit more digestible as a booklet and the colours and the pictures as well. I found it a lot easier. So that's why I decided to go with this one. *Sophie (3)*



Figure 14 - Two dress patterns: V9022 Very Easy Vogue pattern envelope and instructions (top). Tilly and the Buttons 'Stevie' dress pattern envelope and instruction booklet (bottom).

In Phase I, Hope also described indie patterns as presenting information in a 'friendly' manner, offering a supportive tone, and Elly had been impressed by being able to get a personal response to a sewing query via Instagram. These aspects of support and encouragement give the instructions of indie pattern brands a personable and relational feel compared with the more aloof technical writing found in the instructions from commercial patterns. As Sophie suggested, indie pattern instructions

are presented in a way that is more visually appealing and, as Alison (I) put it, ‘makes you feel like you can do it’. However, the proliferation of indie patterns in recent years means that beginner sewists encounter patterns and instructions of variable quality.¹⁵

As Krish suggested:

So, I think there's a big variability in the quality of the modern patterns, whereas the older patterns, I think are a lot more standardised and probably would have gone through a drafting process and a QA [quality assurance] process that perhaps doesn't happen in the same way for modern patterns.

Krish (I)

Sophie experienced this variation in quality, having worked with a less-established indie brand of pattern (Made with Mandi) during the first two Making Periods. Aspects of these instructions, including the cropping of some images, had led to confusion about how exactly the pieces of the camisole top she was making were supposed to be put together. Although, like other indie patterns, the Made by Mandi pattern had come with a hashtag intended to provide access to additional information such as blogs or examples of other people using the same pattern, Sophie had not been able to find any related online content. This experience added to Sophie’s appreciation of the additional resources provided with the Tilly and the Buttons pattern she chose to use in the Third Making Period.

I just found that this Tilly and the Buttons one was much easier because it had ... tips and stuff at the beginning, which I found really helpful. And then there's the jargon buster in there, which I literally refer to so often. Like if you're a beginner and you just don't know things like a ‘tack’ is or ‘staystitch’, all the different types of stitching. So, within the instructions, when it referred to that, if I didn't know what it was, it didn't mean that I had to Google it or go and find

¹⁵ Martindale’s analysis of sixty-one individual websites offering downloadable PDF sewing pattern identified fifty-three did not indicate any ‘patternmaking training or apparel industry experience’ (2020: 161). Instead, many of these pattern designers emphasised being ‘self-taught’.

a video as much. Obviously, I still did that for some things. It just meant I could look at the jargon buster and I thought that was helpful. *Sophie* (3)

Wendy, who during the Second Making Period had been sorting out old patterns that her mum had saved from decades earlier, said that seeing these patterns had really made her appreciate how much ‘hand-holding’ (W2) she was getting from the Tilly and the Buttons book she had used for her first make. To some extent the indie pattern brands are reliant on the online sewing community to complete the picture for beginner sewists learning to sew clothes using the patterns they produce. Where particular patterns have become popular and the associated hashtags lead to additional information, including other people’s experiences of using the same resource, beginners are better supported in their attempts to interpret the pattern and its instructions. Where beginners are not engaged in these communities or are using patterns that have not generated any targeted online content, they usually turn to Google to search for alternative sources of information about aspects of the project they are unsure about. As a result, beginners will often end up viewing videos and other online content addressing similar, but not identical, sewing projects to the one they are trying to understand.

6.4 Working with video resources

Having established the advantages that beginners recognise from using established brands of indie sewing pattern, I will now focus on the online resources that these participants used to support their learning. Online video has played a significant role in the digitally entwined craft revival discussed in Section 3.3. Access to video makes it possible to see crafts such as sewing *in practice* without being co-present with other makers, either in the private space of the home or the public space of a workshop or class. The facility to view craft practices online makes learning at home alone a possibility for those without access to hands-on support. Although some of the more experienced beginners in Phase I had based their decisions of what to make on the availability of pattern specific sewalongs and hashtags, in Phase II it was often only when people struggled with in-pattern instructions that they turned to the internet for additional support. Once online, the choice of available video content is vast. Based on

the online resources that Rasa, Steph, Wendy, Jenny and Sophie used during the project, I have identified six broad types of free online video content see Table 9. This typology illustrates the types of content that the beginner sewists in this study engaged with; it is not presented as an exhaustive or definitive list that would encompass all sewing-related video content.

When participants shared video links with me, I noticed how the content chosen often, in some ways, reflected the individual participant – a similar accent, appearance, attitude or orientation to sewing. Like the personal and relational nature of the indie sewing pattern brands, it seemed that these beginner sewists sought out video content that ‘spoke’ to them as individuals in some way. Wendy looked for online content that was specific to the pattern she was using or which got straight to the point. Jenny looked for content that would boost her confidence by showing her *how* things were done and not just what to do. Rasa looked at an eclectic array of video content, ranging from those providing vintage-clothing-inspired technical sewing tips to those presenting sewing-related content that was predominantly performative rather than instructive. These videos reveal differing degrees of technical expertise and personal narrative content, with the Vintage Inspired, Sewalong and How to Tips and Techniques categories presenting the most directly informative content. Videos in the DIY Cut & Sew and Performative categories, which are often framed in a ‘sustainability’ context (e.g. linked to textile repurposing), tend to offer much more limited insight into technical aspects of sewing.

Video type	Description	Examples (YouTube subscribers/views)
Vintage Inspired (clothing & sewing tips)	Explanation, demonstration, insights and tips drawn from experience of making or working with vintage style clothes or historical costume. Good for technical know-how, less so for where and how to apply techniques to a specific sewing project.	Evelyn Wood (327k) Vintage on Tap (14k/25k)
Sewalong (pattern specific)	Pattern brands or sewing influencers with sewing expertise to relay. Talk through the process of making a garment from a specific pattern step-by-step. Encouraging and supportive tone, offering tips along the way. Professional quality presentation and video editing.	Sew Over It (70.2k) Tilly and the Buttons (42.5k)
How to Tips & Techniques (from pattern brands & skilled YouTubers)	How to tips for specific sewing techniques (e.g. topstitching, neck facing, zip insertion) provided by pattern brands and skilled YouTubers. Clearly presented content combining still and moving image, voice-over and caption, either delivering a series of tips for best results or showing a technique step-by-step in real time.	Ellie & Mac (70.7k) Tilly and the Buttons (42.5k) MADE Everyday (808k)
Enthusiast (vlog style)	Mostly self-taught sewing enthusiasts sharing experiences of making clothes or exploring aspects of sewing practice in a 'this is what I did' or sewalong format. Demonstrate variable levels of technical sewing know-how and presentational skill.	with Wendy (1.41m/866k) I Sew a Lot (9.64k/13k) Sewn on the Tyne (11.6k/5.9k)
DIY Cut & Sew (self-drafted or pattern-free projects)	Amateur demonstration of an individual make, often based on patterns taken from existing clothes or drawn directly onto fabric. Usually short and heavily edited to show major steps, sometimes with written captions. Often speeding through cutting, pinning and sewing process. Variable levels of technical sewing know-how shown or shared.	DIY Crush (24.2k/1.2m) Amanda Wright (39.7k/182k) Jess Dang (498k/166k) Thoughtful Creativity (254k/125k) katstthread (1.85k/95k)
Performative (sewing as entertainment)	YouTubers with quirky ironic tone, using garment sewing as part of a performative narrative pieced together from to-camera dialogue and video clips of making activities, interspersed with text, images or film clips for comedic/ironic effect. The making of items of clothing or costume are documented with limited textile and garment construction know how shown or shared.	Rachel Maksy (1.1m/2-800k) Micarah Tewers (2.1m/200k-3m)

Table 9: Typology of sewing video style and content.

Seeing what you need to see

Participants would often view multiple videos to inform something they were trying to figure out. Where they were unable to find resources specific to the pattern they were using, they would combine insights gleaned from these multiple sources to arrive at a sense of how to proceed.

I was yeah, just I had like resources everywhere. Um, you know, like every single step and you can go and find information ... There's so much out there. But sometimes that can just become like, okay, I've watched ten videos now. I really should actually cut it, or something like that. *Wendy (1)*

Jenny also described juggling different on- and offline resources to inform her sewing practice:

so there was, I think I had paper instructions as well and video that I'd watched. So the paper instructions were useful for making sure I was doing the measurements right. And then the video was useful for showing me like where I needed to measure to and everything like that. So yeah, so I had my pattern out. I had my laptop there with the video and another screen with the written instructions. *Jenny (2)*

Rasa, who had described herself as 'part of the YouTube generation', emphasised how important video was to her being able to understand sewing processes:

But I also find that I learn best when I can hear and see physically how things fit together, especially when it comes to structural things. Hence why even when I messaged the group, I mentioned that I use video because reading words, even seeing a diagram next it, for me, this doesn't make as much sense as seeing somebody actually fold it together. Show where you pin, which side you pin. It translates a lot better to my brain, because I just *see* it. Then I can feel like I can definitely replicate it myself because it's a 3D experience of, you know, seeing everything. *Rasa (1)*

Jenny spoke about watching videos to try to gain insight into how certain processes like pinning fabric or using scissors to cut fabric were performed. She would watch videos several times to ‘glean as much information from what I was seeing, as much as just from what ... Tilly, in the video, is actually saying’. What Jenny describes here appears to be an attempt to see the tacit haptic skill of the sewist in the video. As the skill she is seeking to understand is not what is being spoken about in the video it offers no ‘bridge’ to help Jenny interpret the skill for herself (Wood 2006: 145). Jenny acknowledged the crux of the problem she had as a beginner working with written or even video instructions:

It’s those little things that probably no training course, like online training course or booklet, would ever mention because the people who write those things ... they’re so past ever ... they might be things that they’ve never had to think about if they’ve grown up around people who sew and everything like that. Whereas when you are coming to something completely new, it’s like every tiny detail. *Jenny (1)*

Steph, who said she had always preferred to learn from being shown how things worked rather than reading instructions (much as she had learnt her hairdressing skills), also talked about watching videos multiple times to resolve questions that arose for her when written instructions proved difficult to interpret. Influenced by this preference, during the First Making Period Steph tried to make a pair of pyjama bottoms using a pattern for which she had no instructions, having watched several different videos to inform how she might cut and construct her trousers. Each video emphasised slightly different aspects of the making process and worked with a slightly different trouser pattern to the one that Steph was using. Having watched the videos, when Steph came to make her own pyjama trousers, she mistook the inside and outside leg seams at the cutting out stage, which led her subsequently to trim off some vital fabric intended to form the seat of the trousers (Figure 15). When we discussed the process of making the trousers, Steph was unaware of this mistake and attributed the poor fit of the resulting trousers to other factors. After the ViEW encounter in which we discussed her experience of making the trousers while watching the video

clip of her cutting them out, Steph re-watched the videos she had used to inform the making process and was better able to see how the processes shown in the videos differed from what she had done.

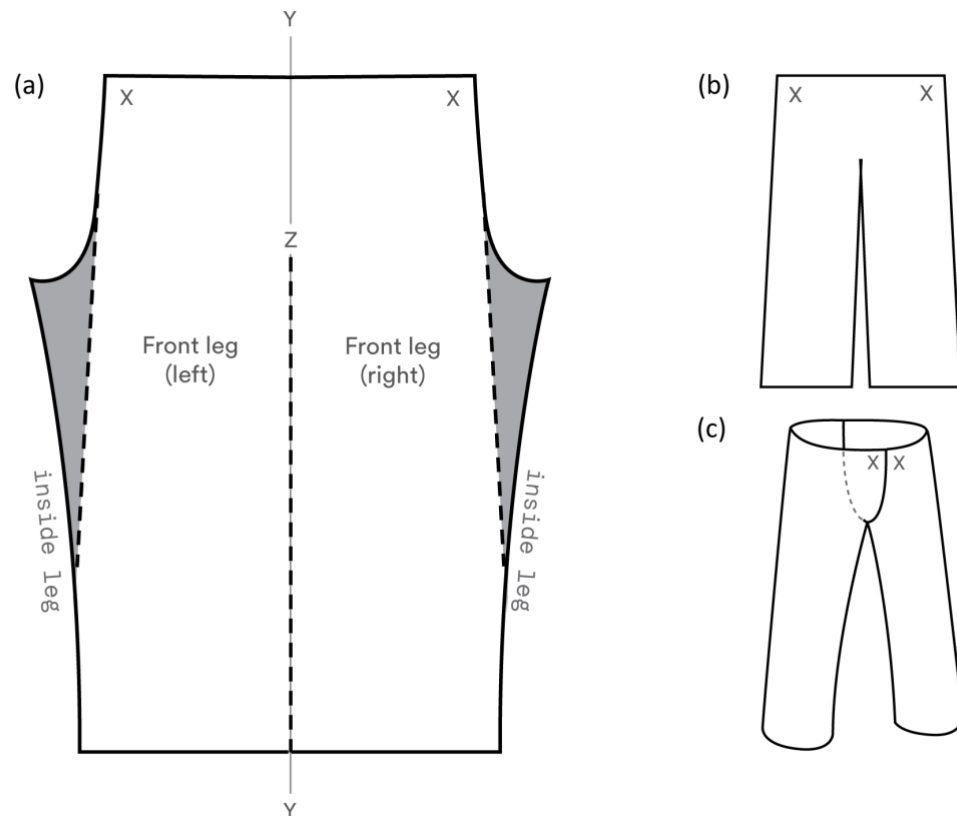


Figure 15 - Constructing pyjama trousers: (a) Two trouser front pieces cut on fold (line Y-Y) and partially separated (dotted line Y-Z). Note position of inside leg. Grey shaded areas incorrectly trimmed away. (b) Trouser front pieces joined to similarly trimmed trouser back pieces to construct trousers in 2D. (c) Trouser front pieces fully separated along fold line Y-Y and joined to similar trouser back pieces to construct trousers as the pattern intended in 3D. Note position of centre front, marked X, in all three illustrations.

These examples illustrate that what beginners see when watching sewing videos and what they need to see in order to replicate the practices shown are not always the same thing. Understandably, with little prior embodied experience of the craft there is so much *to see* (as Jenny highlighted), making it hard to filter the visual information and distil it down sufficiently to inform a way forward. This ability to ‘distinguish between critical actions and optional or even irrelevant actions’ is highlighted by Anna

Ekström as a challenge for those learning textile crafts off- as well as online (2012: 84). Ekström makes the point that ‘while all relevant steps of a certain action are available to be seen in a demonstration, this does not mean that this information is perceivable for a novice’ (ibid.). Wood’s studies (Wood 2006, Wood et. al. 2009), introduced in Section 3.2, also highlight the challenge of attempting to learn through observation and imitation. Where, like Steph, beginners use multiple videos showing slightly different ways to achieve similar ends, the task of filtering and distilling useful information can become even more difficult. As a beginner with a limited understanding of clothes and how they are formed, the links between garment styles, fabric type and the order and nature of their construction may not be stated or easily discerned from the range of video – including Enthusiast and DIY Cut & Sew content – arising from an initial Google search.

Working from video-only instruction

Rasa, who had chosen a commercial skirt pattern to work with in the First Making Period, subsequently worked on two garments from pattern-free DIY Cut & Sew tutorials in the second (see Appendix 16a and 16b for an edited transcript of Rasa’s experience with both these projects). Rasa was attracted to these DIY Cut & Sew projects because they looked like they would be quick and easy.

The reason why I didn't really document the skirt is because at first I thought it was gonna be such a quick make, because I assume ... that according to the video, just you know, sewing up the one bit, and then it's all done, essentially. Just to put a little elastic at the top and that's done. I was like, always going to be my little additional bit that we don't even need to talk about. But then because so many things occurred I just kept ploughing through it. And well here we are, it was an interesting experience. *Rasa (2)*

The video instructions for Rasa’s two DIY Cut & Sew projects were short, fast-paced and heavily edited to show the main steps with little explanation of process. The style of delivery makes it easy to miss important information about measurements or fabric type. Rasa described her experiences with the DIY Cut & Sew projects as a ‘big disaster,

but also really fun' (R2). One of Rasa's reflections in her third ViEW encounter was that although she watched people sewing online a lot, much of the content she watched was more for entertainment value (see Performative video content in Table 9); with little of the making process is shown or explained.

I mean to me that's one of the reflections I've realised even though I watch people sew they're not really focusing on the steps. It's not ... it's never a tutorial absolutely ever. I have seen tutorials, but I mostly watch for the people who are making it and they do whizz past most of the preparation that they do. So it would never be really a supplemental thing for how to learn how to sew and ... but it does sometimes when they run into issues make you aware more of the thinking, but it definitely wouldn't be a 'how to'. *Rasa (3)*

Although Rasa had questioned whether working from video tutorials was really going to work for her, by the time of her Follow-up Interview (a year after her final ViEW encounter) she was planning to make a shirred summer dress from a similar video. The impression many of these videos give, of sewing as a quick and fun way to make clothes, can be very enticing – even for those who have enough experience to realise that, in practice, the process might prove to be more complicated.

It is notable that in many of the Enthusiast and DIY Cut & Sew style videos that Rasa and Steph used, it is the most time-consuming aspects of the making process, such as cutting fabric, aligning and pinning pieces together and sewing seams, that tend to be speeded up. While this makes the video an attractive and digestible length, it prioritises the sequential steps of construction in quick succession without facilitating observation of practices that beginners, in the absence of hands-on support, may also need to glean from the videos they watch. Jenny, who was using slightly longer-form sewalong videos to support her making activities, had been speeding these up so that she could get to the steps she felt she needed to see. It was only when putting these steps into practice that she felt she needed to go back and look more closely at *how* the pinning or cutting of fabric was done.

6.5 Sewing in 3D

Visualisation and orientation

As discussed above, the participants used illustrated instruction and video content in conjunction to help them visualise how particular pieces of a garment might join to form part of the envisaged whole. Rasa described her attempts to understand and visualise how she might insert a zip into her skirt, before successfully doing so (Figure 16).

I would mostly watch it [online video] in a general manner. If it was like a concept, like stay stitching, and then I would just maybe look up/Google some particularities [...] and then I would just do it myself. So it wouldn't be a step-by-step process. It was mostly like intake, my interpretation and my understanding of it, and then doing it practically, in connection with what the pattern is saying ... [W]ith the zipper, I looked up more step-by-step instructions ... and I like when people sew up the whole edge, then pin it [the zip] to the back. [...] But then in the instructions ... there's a lot of pressing under this and pressing under that and it just sounds confusing [...] I can't visualise them in my head. Those specific words , because they're new to me [...] it doesn't automatically bring up a visual and this little thingy [points to illustration in pattern instructions] doesn't speak to me either. *Rasa (1)*



Entry from Rasa's sewing journal 3rd April 2021

Aim: Decide on the method I'll use to attach the zipper and get it done.

Approach: Attempt to understand the original pattern instructions on zipper instalment again and check for possible issues down the line if using different method.

How it went: I ended up just biting the bullet and following an online zipper sewing tutorial by MADE Everyday on YouTube. It was very clear and doable. I still struggled a bit with positioning the zipper inside the seam straight and sewing around the zipper pull so my stitches ended up a bit wonky... so the inside is NOT pretty...but it worked!

How do I feel: There's definitely plenty of area for improvement – there is no way a zipper like mine should exist in a commercial garment but it was my very first time so I'll take it! If you don't look too closely you can't really tell anyway so it's fine. I am slightly concerned about finishing seams though as now the zipper is slightly in the way.

Figure 16 - Rasa's New Look Skirt, zip detail and journal entry reflecting on process and outcome.

Sophie described a similar experience of trying to visualise the process of adding straps and inserting a facing¹⁶ at the top edge of a camisole. Like Rasa, Sophie used a combination of written instructions and videos showing the necessary step in the construction of similar (but not identical) garments.

I don't think the instructions were right [...] From what they told me, when I was trying to figure it out, it wouldn't have worked. So I kind of had to think off my ... I had a few googlings of different garments that were similar to see if I was along the same lines[...] And then I think I mentioned it to you on [WhatsApp], it came to me once when I was in bed trying to figure it out ... There wasn't anything [online] that matched it [the camisole] identically. So yeah, a bit of googling. Bit of clips of videos that weren't exactly the same garment but similar type. And then just try and visualise it in my head. *Sophie* (2)

As Jenny observed, one of the things that can be confusing about clothes sewing, especially as a beginner, is that you are working on the inside and not the outside of the garment.

I think it's that whole thing of forgetting that you're working on the inside of the garment as well. I think that's what confuses me sometimes is that you're not working on the outside, you're working on the inside, which is why you trim ... like the seam allowance isn't the bit that I thought it was, kind of thing. *Jenny* (2)

Unlike other crafts written about in the craft literature discussed in Section 3.2 – such as pottery (Groth 2022), glassblowing (O'Connor 2017), basket weaving (Ingold 2013, 2021), pocket-knife making (Wood et al. 2009) or forging (Thane 2021) – the process of clothes sewing is not one in which the finished object materialises fully formed before the maker's eyes during the making process. Instead, when sewing clothes, the maker works mostly from the inside of a garment that only takes its full form when worn on

¹⁶ See Glossary in Appendix 17 for a description of a 'facing' and Figure 18 for a visual example.

the body. Consequently, the construction of clothes is reliant to a great extent on procedural (step-by-step) instructions. Such instructions – which, particularly when aimed at beginners, tend to say relatively little about the process of trying on and fitting the garment to the individual body – inevitably do not reflect the full complexity of the craft involved in making clothes. Contemporary pattern instructions and online resources offer a supportive tone and tips that enable beginners to proceed with making despite their uncertainties, but can leave the embodied practice of sewing and the tacit knowledge it requires obscured.

Unfamiliar with the processes of clothes construction, beginners find it particularly challenging to visualise steps in which the flat pieces of fabric are brought together to form a garment in three dimensions. Wendy highlighted this when she described her experience of working out how to put the front and back pieces of her pyjama trousers together before sewing the side seams.

Just when I was pinning them together, it did say lay them on top of each other, but you don't need them to match up because they're going to be different sizes front and back. But you just need the raw edges to [match up]. And I did that three times, at least. Because I kept doing it ... pinning it wrong. And I was thinking, Well the notch is up here or this isn't in the right place. But actually, when I read it and understood it to say, yeah, just the raw edges [need to match]. But I do remember, you know, it's like saying, remember that there needs to be a human leg in there and you're not flat [laughs] you know ...

Wendy (1)

To be able to visualise a step in the process of garment construction requires attention to the orientation of garment pieces, both in relation to one another and in terms of which side of each fabric piece – the ‘right’ side (i.e. outward facing or patterned side) or ‘wrong’ side (i.e. inside or underside) – should be uppermost before the pieces are joined. That is, whether each piece of the garment should be right-side out or inside out before it is sewn together. This orientational conundrum arose wherever participants encountered facings that were to be applied around to the openings (e.g.

neck, arm or waist) of an item they were making. All the participants who encountered this step in constructing a garment struggled to make sense of it from the images and words in the pattern instructions alone. Steph, who encountered facings in all three Making Periods, took several attempts to get to grips with this challenge.

But I struggled, looking at the ... you know, the diagrams, the pictures that she's [Tilly and the Buttons] put out, and then putting that position of what she's got onto my dress ... That threw me because I felt like the interfacing was on the outside. It isn't it, the right side? Does that make sense? ... and, honestly, even looking at it now, it's like, What's that? It just ... even at the top one [photo in instruction booklet – Figure 17], actually where you can see a bit of the pocket, that's confused ... It confused me a lot. *Steph (1)*

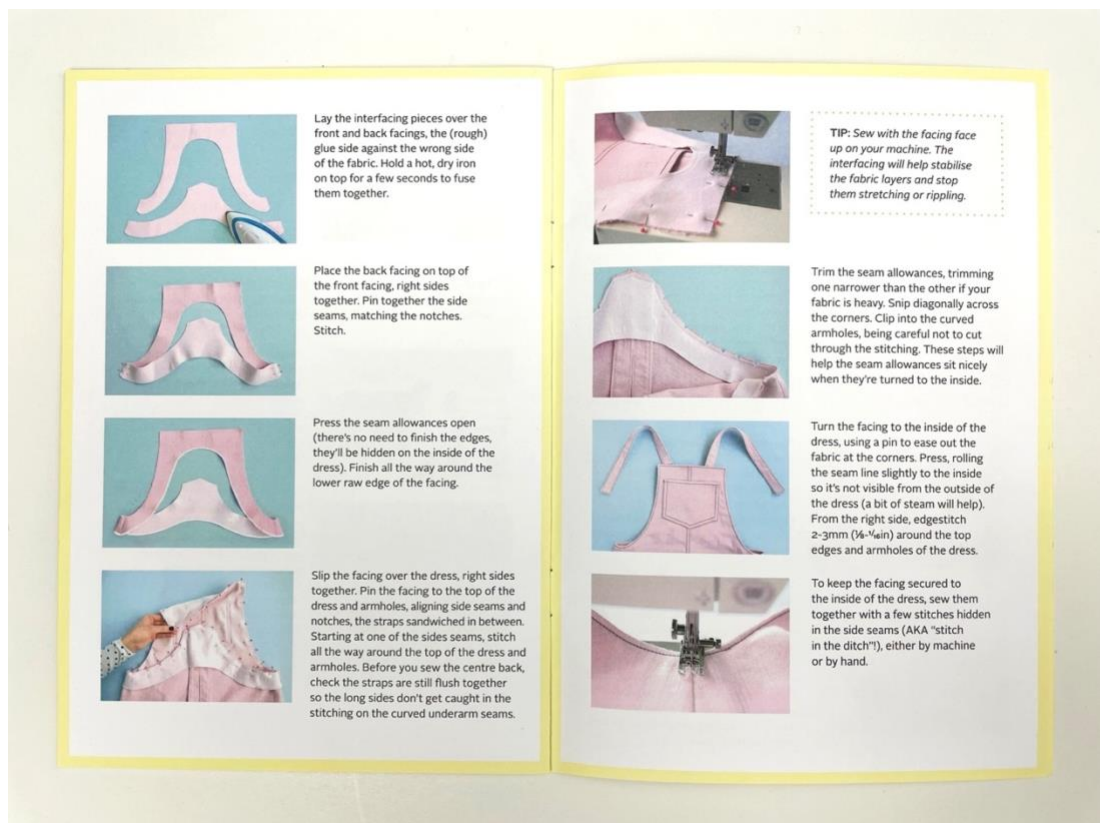


Figure 17 - Instruction booklet for Tilly and the Buttons 'Cleo' pinafore dress showing the steps to add facing. The image Steph is referring to appears top right.

When Steph encountered a neck facing for a second time, we talked about this step in more detail using one of my homemade garments as an example. The language of inside/outside and right side/wrong side rendered our conversation almost comedic. Had we been together with the garments (the one Steph had made and the one I was using to try to explain the process) in a physical space the explanations, understandings and misunderstandings we were trying to relay to each other would have been much more easily shown than they were articulated through words, hand gestures and garments and pattern instructions held up to our respective laptop cameras. Steph's misunderstanding of this making step and our shared experience of trying to resolve it highlighted both the complexities of conveying sewing techniques through illustrated written instructions and the limitations of the laptop screen in conveying the material practice of garment construction at full scale in three-dimensional space. During the ViEW encounter I was unsure whether my explanation via the video call had been sufficient to make sense to Steph. I followed up with a series of images of a dress in quarter scale as a tool to help Steph visualise, I hoped more clearly, the orientation of garment pieces when applying a neck facing to a dress (Figure 18). Steph's response was that this was going to be a 'game changer' for her and very useful.

The observations that the participants made about the challenges of visualisation, and my understanding of the difficulties they described, highlighted the extent to which sewing instructions are dependent on visual as well as verbal language. Photographic images are often preferred by sewing beginners because they are more visually appealing and are assumed to require less interpretation than the diagrams used in most commercial patterns. However, the differentiation between 'right' and 'wrong' (face and reverse) sides of fabric pieces and/or the orientation of the in-progress garment as a whole – which a technical illustration might highlight more explicitly – sometimes proved to be hard to discern from a photographic image. Video can aid the interpretation of instructions by showing sewing actions in motion and the garment being made in three dimensions. However, these moving images do not always correlate directly with the written instructions they are being used to supplement. When shot from a static camera angle, videos do not allow for a three-dimensional

view of the object at hand, which means these images also require interpretation. It is in the transition between two and three dimensions and from the inside to the outside of the garment that many misunderstandings, frustrations and disappointments arise in the process of sewing.

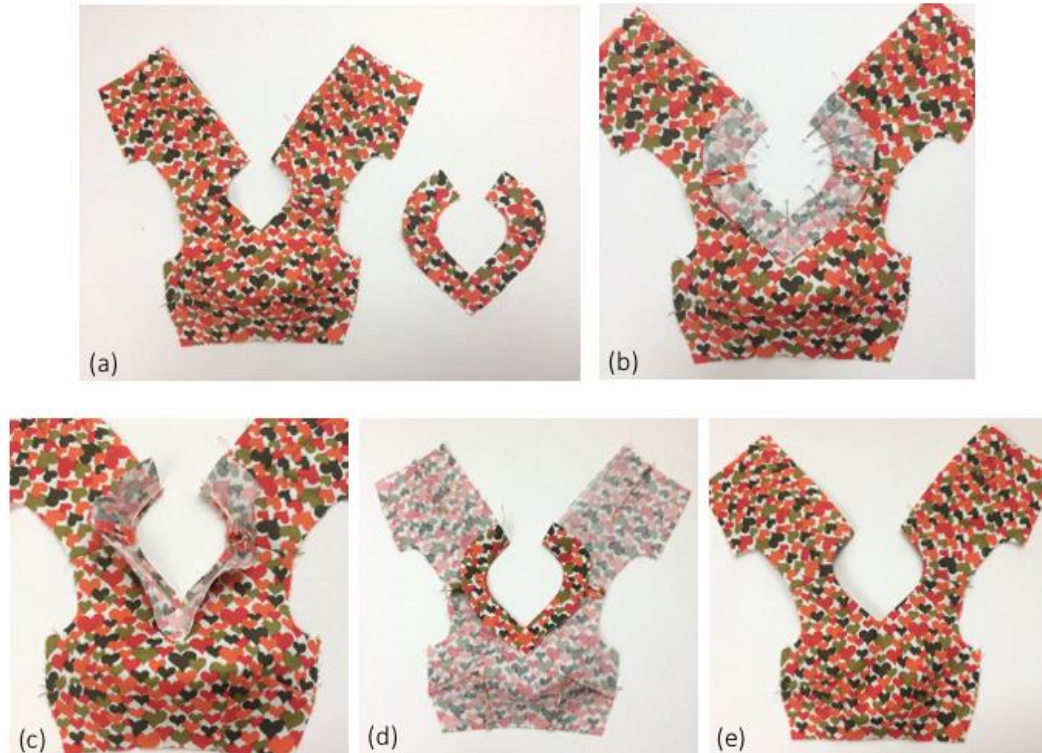


Figure 18 - Images depicting procedural steps to add a neck facing to a dress, demonstrated at quarter scale: (a) bodice and neck facing, (b) bodice and neck facing aligned right-sides together and pinned, (c) facing stitched around neck line, (d) facing turned through to the inside of the bodice, (e) bodice with neck facing added and pressed to the inside around the neck.

Democratised and decontextualised content

The ‘democratising’ effect of the internet (Gauntlett 2018) has led to the proliferation of free sewing-related content online and a de-contextualisation of the knowledge that is shared between home sewists. A lot of online sewing videos are heavily edited and provide no context in terms of the time, space and resources used or the technical knowledge and skill of the person presenting the ‘tutorial’. Often well under 10 minutes in length, Enthusiast and DIY Cut & Sew content in particular (see Table 9) tends to show only the major sequential steps of garment construction, with aspects

of the making process (e.g. cutting fabric and sewing seams) either speeded up or edited out altogether. As Rasa found when using DIY Cut & Sew videos for making two garments during the Second Making Period, the impression these videos give of how a sewing project *should* look and feel in practice can be misleading, especially to beginners with little or no direct (unmediated) experience of seeing other people sew offline. With limited technical and embodied knowledge of the craft to inform their judgment, it can be difficult for beginners to discern the quality of the information presented in these videos. In addition, the sheer volume of sewing videos online means that beginners often find themselves working with multiple disparate sources to inform their actions.

From Jenny's and Rasa's examples, it appears that beginners do look to video for both procedural instruction and insight into tacit aspects of practice that might be gleaned there – *how* something might be done and not just what to do. As Steph's experience illustrates, with so much to see at once, it is not always easy for beginners to home in on what they need to see at any given point. Gustav Thane (2021) demonstrates how video of craft practice, in his example forging metal, can be overlaid with drawn illustration, to focus the viewer's attention on what they need to observe during the making process. This brings together the advantages of video – moving image of craft in process – and more technical diagrammatic elements that elucidate the craft involved.

6.6 The affective dimension of learning to sew

When describing their experiences of learning to sew, Rasa, Steph, Wendy, Jenny and Sophie expressed a variety of emotions. On the positive side, there was excitement and enjoyment in learning something new, as well as pleasure and surprise at what could be achieved. As their sewing confidence grew with practice, there was also pride in the new knowledge and skills acquired and the wearable garments created. On the less positive side, there were uncertainties about what to do or how to tackle a particular task, worries about wasting time and materials, and fear of making mistakes. Due to their lack of familiarity with sewing practices and the language used to describe them, the participants sometimes found instructions daunting and even

overwhelming. Intransigent tools and materials caused frustrations, as did online and written instructions that sometimes added to confusion or uncertainty rather than resolving the issue at hand. Disappointment was experienced when a sewing task or garment had not worked out as planned.

The largely self-directed learners in this study quickly identified strategies to enhance the positive and avoid the negative affect they experienced through sewing. They developed their own routines and ways of practising to try to make sewing easier and more enjoyable for themselves. They moved or rearranged the spaces they worked in, acquired different tools, sought out additional online advice and instruction, and watched and re-watched videos of other people sewing as they tried to glean the information they felt they needed. It was not always easy for the participants to find the time, energy and motivation to sew, despite their enthusiasm for it and the positive feelings they derived from doing it. Some participants found it difficult to get started on a new project (Wendy, Jenny) or to bring a making project to completion, especially if it looked like it might not work out as had been hoped at the start (Rasa). Others showed a great deal of determination to complete garments despite the difficulties they encountered in the process and the known imperfections of the emerging garment (Sophie, Steph).

Enjoyment and excitement

The experience of tackling a new project and learning new skills were common factors in the enjoyment participants derived from sewing.

I think the most enjoyable parts are just like, actually, doing something new ... coming to a challenge, like a full bust adjustment, and then actually working my way through it and coming out with a cut out piece of fabric that I think is gonna work. It's those little ... like passing those little milestones of doing each ... like learning each little bit. So I guess it's the learning is the most enjoyable bit. *Jenny (2)*

Rasa seemed comfortable not always knowing quite how the projects she was working on would work out, as this was where she felt she learnt the most.

But yeah, definitely the learning and obviously it's a physical thing coming apart ... or coming together, which is fun, and my brain has gone to, oh maybe I can do this, and that, and that, and that. And I looked up like whole bust adjustments because I was like that's going to be relevant at some point if I want to make a top. Yeah, I just I enjoy seeing other people sew online and I enjoy now learning about it as well. *Rasa (1)*

The participants frequently expressed excitement about sewing, particularly starting new projects, wearing items they had made or foreseeing the possibility of doing so in future. This excitement sometimes led to sewing steps being skipped accidentally at the beginning or rushed at the end out of a desire to see a garment finished.

I just think, again I've said it before I just need to slow my whole process down and just take, you know, but I do, I get very giddy about the sewing [laughs] and the result. *Steph (3)*

Jenny was particularly excited at how her first garment (a pair of pyjama shorts) had turned out, especially because they fit her so well.

But yeah, cos ... but they're really comfortable, cos you don't want anything too tight when it's pyjamas anyway. So they definitely wouldn't fall down, but they're not going to be uncomfortable either. And like walking in them, I think they're fine. So yeah, I was really shocked and excited about the fact that they actually fit! *Jenny (1)*

One of the things the participants found most exciting about learning to sew was the possibility of being able to tailor clothes to their preferences (Sophie) or fit them to their own body (Jenny). However, as Rasa discovered, fitting clothes to the body did not always turn out to be as easy as was initially hoped.

So sewing seemed like a nice slow fashion way to make some pieces that I can actually like and can fit me better. But obviously, with the experience I've had, it's not ... first of all, it's not that quick, and it's not that easy and still it might not work out. *Rasa* (3)

Pleasure, pride and confidence

Garments that turned out well were a source of pleasure and pride for participants, as was the experience of having successfully worked out how to do a certain task or bring a project to completion. The participants also took pride in the knowledge they had gained and in the neatness of some of their seams.

Yeah, I'm really enjoying learning and you know, apply myself to something. There is a massive sense of achievement of finishing a garment and having something that I can wear. Yeah, I feel really proud of that. *Wendy* (2)

And I think it makes me sort of proud that I now have more knowledge than I did before. I find that really enjoyable like the learning aspect of it definitely. And I like that it's a craft because we don't tend to have or you know, condone lots of crafts. *Rasa* (1)

When the participants expressed pleasant surprise or a sense of achievement this was often about how something they were making or doing had turned out better, or been easier, than expected.

But yeah, definitely a big sense of achievement to make something like this [Tilly and the Buttons, 'Stevie' Dress], especially on a second go. *Sophie* (3)

All the participants talked about gaining sewing confidence through practice, whether that was through testing stitches or using scrap fabric at the start (*Sophie*), feeling more confident cutting out a second pattern piece (*Jenny*) or applying skills learnt in an earlier project (*Wendy*). Having sewn tentatively at the start, *Sophie's* confidence

quickly grew as she got used to working with the sewing machine. She felt she would gain confidence from being able to hold up her first finished garment.

it might not be something I actually wear because it's just like leftover material. But once I've done that, it'll give me the confidence to actually make something and I actually want to make, something that I can wear. *Sophie (1)*

When reflecting on what she had learnt over the three Making Periods, Wendy felt confident that her experience would enable her resolve more of the difficulties she would encounter when sewing in future.

Yeah, but a lot more confident. And actually knowing that I can maybe work it out a bit more. I've got neater. But I did start off with a bit of a tricky fabric. *Wendy (3)*

Rasa also felt that having more experience and a better sense of what was possible gave her a better chance of resolving sewing issues in future. Steph, who had not completed all her projects to her own satisfaction, felt her confidence had increased despite this.

I just feel I feel like my confidence has just shot up. You know, I get excited to make the next thing. Despite my ... I've got lots of things that have gone wrong. So yeah, I feel like, I feel like I'm in this for good now [laughs]. *Steph (3)*

Uncertainty and confusion

As complete beginners, the participants in the study often found written instructions confusing. Difficulty interpreting these instructions or understanding the purpose of a particular step in those instructions led to uncertainty about what to do, how to do it or whether what had already been done would work out.

So, I really struggled with this one, with the zigzag. It was very much a case of not really knowing like where the fabric should be aligned to. And I guess the zigzag is something that I'm not ... I still don't fully understand how it works. So in terms of ... like, should the point of the zig zag be over the end of the fabric or should it just be at the end of the fabric ... it just doesn't really make sense to me and so I think that contributed to me finding it quite difficult. And also, I wasn't sure which was the best size to use or things like that. *Jenny (1)*

As discussed in Section 6.4, when written instructions did not make sense, participants would head online to find answers. Online content often proved helpful but could also be contradictory, partial or simply misunderstood. Where participants strayed from the instructions or questioned an aspect of the garment they were making, they could easily find themselves in a no-mans-land where multiple additional questions arose and the information alighted on in different resources did not align with each other or the specific task at hand.

And the zipper is in the next step. And I'm trying to ... I keep reading the instructions going, hmm okay, and then watching some videos going, this looks different. *Rasa (1)*

In these situations, participants usually persevered through a process of trial and error (see Section 6.7).

Fear, anxiety and frustration

All the participants expressed some anxieties or fears in relation to their sewing activities, acknowledging that it can be daunting to step out of one's 'comfort zone' (Jenny) and do something new. The participants' fears were expressed as a fear of failure, particularly at the start of a project.

I think, so it's very much the measuring, tracing, getting all those bits done that seems to take the longest time for me. I think maybe that's just fear, fear of messing it up at that stage. You can't unpick a cut. *Wendy (2)*

I think I panic on this bit, trying to make sure it's all you know, set how it should be. Because if this bit's wrong, the dress is going to be wrong. So I think I get a little bit panicky. *Steph (2)*

Most participants made a first garment or test garment using old fabric or bedding at some point in the project so they would feel less nervous.

I used bedding ... I was so nervous, you know, about doing this on the cord that I ended up finding some old bedding and I thought I'm going to practice on this before getting on to the real deal. And I did and it was actually ... I'm really glad I did that. *Steph (1)*

Some participants described feeling overwhelmed at times with lots of new information (Rasa), sewing terminology (Sophie) or choice, e.g. of fabrics (Jenny) or patterns (Wendy). Sewing machines, pins, patterns, zips and binding all arose in our discussions as tools, materials or techniques that participants felt some trepidation about. Some of these turned out to not be as scary as expected (e.g. Wendy's zip). Others quickly became less daunting with experience.

Most participants expressed feeling annoyed or experiencing frustration with aspects of sewing. These were most frequently due to confusion about instructions, problems with sewing machines or tools and materials that were lacking or proving hard to handle. Rasa expressed frustration with wanting to be neat but not having the space she felt she needed to achieve that (see Section 8.3).

when I was tracing the patterns I was working on this like stupid small little table ... it was physical comedy in a way because I was just like even though I thought about this task but actually it's executing it needs a bit more forethought. So that was both fun and really frustrating ... I had plenty of moments where I was like, oh my god this is so infuriating. Also because you want it to be neat and I'm not a precise person by nature. *Rasa (1)*

Disappointment

Where participants expressed disappointment it was usually because the results of their sewing had not turned out as they wanted, either because the garments did not look or fit as they had hoped or were not as well sewn as they would have liked (the wearability of homemade clothes is addressed in Chapter 7). Steph experienced a number of such disappointments, particularly with the dress she attempted to make in the Third Making Period. Despite being described on the commercial pattern envelope as ‘Easy’, Steph concluded that this particular make had been too advanced for her. The pattern included design details she had been unable to fathom from the instructions and used a weighty stretch jersey that proved difficult for her to handle. As well as expressing disappointment, Steph’s reaction was also one of determination: ‘I’m really, really gutted. But anyway ... it’s not going to stop me whatsoever’. She had shown similar determination earlier on, saying she would not ‘give up on something’ if she liked it. Steph was the most prolific maker in the project and continued sewing beyond Phase II of the project.

Sophie showed similar determination when trying to complete her first garment during the first two Making Periods, even though she knew the camisole she was making was not something she would end up wearing.

I definitely want to persevere with this and I’m keen to ... determined is the word ... to get it done. So yeah, I’ll be ... I’m sure I’ll be ecstatic when I’ve got the first piece done. *Sophie (1)*

A summary of the affective dimensions of sewing experience is provided in Table 10 below. The remainder of this chapter will consider the relevance of these findings to the design and use of sewing resources and the cultural positioning of amateur clothes sewing as a craft.

Table 10: Summary of the affective dimensions of learning to sew.

POSITIVE EMOTIONS		PRACTICE	NEGATIVE EMOTIONS	
Increase through practice →		Doing new things	← Decrease through practice	
Excitement (about possibility of bespoke choice and fit)	Relate to: Learning new skills (internalising/assimilating) 'Wearable' garments (externalising/materialising)	Working with instructions	Relate to: Decision making (internal/exercising agency) Things you can't control (external/materialities)	Uncertainty & Confusion (from not being able to see a way forward)
Enjoyment (from learning)		Engaging with tools & materials		Fear & Anxiety (about making mistakes/having to choose)
Pleasure & Pride (from knowledge gained and items made and worn)		Trial & Error		Annoyance & Frustration (with material aspects tools/materials + time/space)
Confidence (from applying knowledge and 'realising' things)		Feeling your way		Disappointment (of unrealised vision - aesthetic/fit/finish)

6.7 Home sewing as craft practice

Trial and error

As we have seen, those wanting to sew clothes for themselves are well catered for in terms of patterns and procedural instruction, with contemporary resources presenting information clearly and simply in a supportive and encouraging tone. In conjunction with these resources, the internet provides innumerable additional sources of information – written, visual and animated – that home sewists can and do use to inform their making practices or make sense of procedural instructions. What is less obvious from these sources, especially to beginners, is the enormous number of in-the-moment and aesthetic judgements that are involved in bringing clothes into being, as illustrated in the experience that Rasa relays below. Having made a partial mock-up of a skirt using a soft sheeting fabric, Rasa had multiple questions about how the half-completed garment might work in the stiffer cotton she was planning to use for ‘the real thing’. Vacillating between fit, fall, style and her own skill level, Rasa tried to work out what to do for the best. Would completing the waistband make it fit differently or should she decide to take it in right now? Would her ‘wobbly’ stitching impact on the fit of the end result? Where was the drop waist supposed to sit anyway? Was the excess to do with ease? Would the test garment hang differently if she wasn’t trying it on over jeans? Would the stiffer fabric work for her if she changed the length of the skirt? Should she make it as is and take the risk of ending up with something she might not wear?

I like the colour and the pattern [of the intended skirt fabric], which is a reason why I bought it [...] what was holding me back was not knowing how I'll actually want it to fall in the end [...] if I'm going to want it shorter I would like it to be more fitted [...] But if we're keeping that sort of wide A-shape as a longer skirt then it can be slightly loose around the hips and just lie a little bit lower [...]

There was quite a lot of [...] ‘what ifs’. *Rasa (1)*

The multiplicity of questions that arise and the judgements that must be made in the course of a sewing project – from the tacit and least ‘visible’ (e.g. how do I insert a pin into fabric) to the more explicit and materially consequential (e.g. how do I adjust

what I have in front of me so that it is wearable) – are an essential part of the craft of home sewing. It is only by navigating these uncertainties that sewing skills are learnt. The need to make judgements and understand the consequences of the actions that follow is what makes clothes sewing a craft *practice* rather than simply an alternative form of clothing *production* that those with little experience might assume it to be. This observation arises from my analysis of the negative emotions expressed by beginner sewists, which tend to be related to the need to make decisions from a position of uncertainty and grapple with the material reality of the making process, including the use of unfamiliar tools and materials in often less-than-ideal domestic workspaces (see Section 8.3).

As O'Connor notes in relation to her experience of glassblowing, 'proficiency' is not about making something perfect; it is about 'coming up with effective solutions to all the problems that consistently present themselves in the process' of making (2005: 200). Developing the prerequisite skills to practice any craft, including creating and working with textiles, involves balancing knowledge and emotion with expectation (Niedderer and Townsend 2014; Townsend & Niedderer 2016). For those self-identifying as perfectionists, such as Jenny and Sophie, the reality of *sewing as craft practice* – i.e. requiring trial and error – can be challenging. For Jenny, perfectionism often resulted in prevarication at the start of a project, when choosing fabrics or trying to set her workspace up so that the sewing process could go as well as possible.

And part of it was, you know, just my usual procrastination because once I'd have to do it and it might not be perfect. But part of it was just ... and also the perfectionist thing of I need to have everything ready so I can just get on with it. But yeah, it was ... even just like setting up the room took ages. *Jenny (1)*

Sophie also made a tentative start, wanting the stitching on her first make to be neat. If her seams were not as straight as she would like, Sophie would unpick and sew them again.

Yeah, I think so sometimes I'm a little bit of a perfectionist, and I think, well, one of the darts I initially did was really wonky so I had to unpick it. But I think it's just I just need to remind myself that you don't see the inside stitching, so it doesn't matter if it's not the neatest thing in the world. What matters is you know, what it looks like on the other side of the pattern. *Sophie* (1)

For beginner sewists perfectionism can be both a positive and a negative trait. A degree of precision, and the perseverance to redo something that has not turned out well, can result in better-made and more durable garments that might be more readily or regularly worn (see Section 7.2). But perfectionism can also make it hard to start or finish a project and so to engage in the process of trial and error that clothes sewing (like all crafts) requires, with all the affective experiences that may bring.

Craft and community

Craft is commonly associated with community. The social aspect of learning is particularly pertinent to the learning of craft skills, highlighted in craft literature and informing amateur craft-related research (e.g. Twigger Holroyd 2013, Hackney et al. 2016, Mayne 2020, Willett et al. 2022). As we have seen, contemporary sewing culture has a strong relational element: the style of instruction and the online content produced by indie pattern brands appeal to people on a relational level. I observed that beginners tend towards online resources that 'speak to them' as individuals in some way as well as providing them with the information they feel they need. Based on the findings of the S4S project Willett et al. highlight the importance of 'cultural milieu' to the adoption and continued pursuance of sustainable clothing and craft practices (2022: 219). This sense of community – being part of a social or cultural milieu – is what many people gain from online sewing groups and sewing blogs, such as those featured in Jess Bain's research (2016). Wendy described how she had found pattern reviews written by other amateur sewists to be a quicker route to understanding aspects of the making process than some of the videos she viewed.

I think actually, in the end, it was less of a video and more of a pattern review. So it was more ... I was looking for like sewalongs and things like that. But I

think in the end, it was on a pattern review that people had said certain tips. So that was again, it was like, I'm gonna, just quickly read this and it will say this was good, I would recommend this or not this. Straight to the point. And if it was something that I'd been struggling with or thought about that just went, Bing! Okay, I'm on the right lines. (W1)

Some of the more experienced beginners in Phase I were actively engaged in online sewing communities where sewing experiences are shared. However, as complete beginners, if the participants in Phase II engaged in these spaces at all it was mostly from the outside looking in – lurking (Torrey et al. 2009) – rather than being active contributors bringing questions and experiences of their own to the discussion. Like the interviewees in Phase I, the Phase II participants had limited in-person contact in their everyday lives with other people who sewed, meaning that what limited social dimension there was to their sewing experience was digitally mediated – via the online content they viewed, the project WhatsApp group (which saw only limited use) and through their ViEW encounters with me.

One of the things that is particularly valuable about craft learning in a community setting (e.g. in a class or workshop) is the ability to see others try and fail. When Jenny tried to reassure herself about the outcomes of any sewing she might do in the future she reflected on the visibility of imperfections with reference to *Sewing Bee*.

I find it [*Sewing Bee*] good though, that you see like all the things that like, don't really go well, that the judges pick up on and it actually makes no difference to how the finished product looks. So like, you know, 95% of the population would be perfectly happy with that garment and the judges are like ripping it apart. And it's like, oh, yeah, so it's fine. It doesn't have to be perfect for it to be wearable. There is a hope for me [laughs]. Jenny (2)

Several of the participants had become enthusiastic watchers of *Sewing Bee* and gleaned sewing insight from watching others sewing and making mistakes. With so much online video content edited to emphasise procedural steps performed

‘successfully’ or serve a particular narrative – rather than showing processes and practices that are more improvisational and context specific, it would be easy to assume that making experiences that turn out to be messy and complex are somehow a personal shortcoming. Being able to see others try and fail can be instructive and motivating when trying to learn a practical skill. Reflecting on their experience of trying to deliver a practical jewellery course online during the Covid-19 pandemic, Yother and Teratani (2022) found that their initial approach to online teaching – using Powerpoint slides and pre-recorded video demonstrations – fell flat. The approach they subsequently evolved, using live-streamed demonstrations and students’ phones clamped in position to show and share their hands at work at their makeshift jewellery benches, was considerably more successful.

They watched each other’s hands as they worked, and saw our live-streamed responses on their screens as we repeated demos and fielded their questions. This eased their performance anxiety. Students found it easier to forgive their own mistakes when they could see everyone else engaged in the same struggle. (Yother & Teratani 2022: 383)

A genuine view into other people’s unedited sewing practices, which would be a feature of in-person encounters (e.g. classes, workshops, shared sewing spaces), is not so readily found online and was not facilitated by the methods used in this research. In this, the research mirrored the experiences that Phase I findings suggested were common for contemporary sewing beginners – few of whom, like the Phase II participants, had friends who also sewed.

In emphasising the importance of cultural milieu to social practices, the S4S project (Willett et al. 2022) highlights the role of affect in determining those practices that are adopted, shared and perpetuated. Simply lecturing people about the dire environmental consequences of common fashion practices generates negative emotional affect. By contrast, engaging people in creative practices linked to more sustainable clothing practices generates positive emotional affect (ibid.). To develop, continue and incorporate such practices into everyday life, the S4S project suggests,

requires a supportive and affirmative cultural milieu. Nurturing positive affect through a sense of community can help to bridge the attitude-behaviour gap that is often observed in relation to fashion – i.e. where people continue with clothing consumption habits that are at odds with their ethical or environmental beliefs or concerns (Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002). As the Emotional Fit project also highlights, where making clothes is understood as a socio-cultural practice, and treated as such, it has the potential to enhance a sense of personal agency (Townsend et al. 2017).

In her essay *Happy Objects* Sara Ahmed describes affect as being ‘sticky’ – attaching to objects, which might be values, practices, styles, or aspirations as well as material things (2010: 29). Happiness, Ahmed suggests, ‘turns us towards objects’: if we are happy we are affected *by something*, we are happy *about it* and this being happy makes the something good (ibid.). What makes us happy is personal but also socially and culturally prescribed. The association commonly made, particularly on social media, between clothes making and joyful self-expression offers a romanticised vision of how sewing is, or should be, experienced. As Ahmed explains with reference to women who are content not having children, someone whose experience does not align with the positive affective associations of a dominant culture becomes an ‘affect alien’ (2010: 39). The generally positive tone of on- and offline sewing resources greatly enhances the desirability of clothes sewing as a hobby and as an alternative, potentially more sustainable, form of *clothing production*. However, resources that obscure the complexity of *sewing as a craft* may also enhance the likelihood of affective alienation – that is, experiencing clothes sewing as more challenging and at times less enjoyable than it is commonly portrayed.

6.8 Conclusion

In the first half of this chapter I focused on the different kinds of on- and offline resources that beginners used when starting to learn to sew. The Phase II participants’ experiences of using various sewing patterns and resources add to evidence from Phase I and elsewhere (e.g. Martindale 2017, 2020) suggesting that indie patterns *do* generally cater better for the needs of sewing beginners than more traditional commercial patterns. However, experiences with less well tried and tested indie

patterns and less successful experiences with patterns from established indie brands highlight the extent to which this newer generation of resources rely on user-generated content and online communities to supplement instruction for those who are completely new to sewing.

The popular resurgence of interest in crafts, including sewing, is strongly linked to the advent of online communities and social media content (e.g. Bain 2016, Gauntlett 2018). However, the experiences of beginner sewists in this research raise questions about the extent to which complete beginners engage with those online communities, or are able to navigate towards the content and communities that are useful to them. Amongst the YouTube videos participants shared with me, there were many that functioned better as entertainment or inspiration for sewing – perpetuating the perception of clothes sewing as quick, easy, fun and sustainable – than at relaying technical skills or transferable know-how to the viewer. The sheer quantity of online sewing content can make it difficult for those with little embodied experience of the craft to discern what will be useful to them or to see what they need to see in the videos they watch. What a beginner might need to see, as Jenny identifies, is not solely the steps of constructing a garment but the bodily actions of the maker: some insight into their embodied (tacit or personal) knowledge, such as the focus of attention, the subtle manipulation of materials or how it might feel to perform an action. These are the aspects of a craft largely learnt through practice but which well-crafted resources might attempt to ‘bridge’ (Wood 2006) or draw attention towards (Thane 2021), especially when learning is solo and two-way communication with other practitioners is limited. The observation that the participants in this study appeared to seek out, or prefer content created by others who were in some way similar to them, suggests a seeking of likeminded people to whom they could relate. However, the interaction participants had with the content they found online was primarily from the outside looking in, viewing rather than engaging with others. The fact that these participants had not yet found online communities with which to engage more fully might reflect their status as beginners or their preferences for online sharing more generally. But if part of the search for online resources and support involves finding ‘people like me’ then many would-be sewists – especially those who do not fit the young, white, female

and largely middle-class demographic dominant in online sewing spaces – might also struggle to identify communities they want to join rather than observe.

The S4S project highlighted both the role of community and affect – a positive ‘cultural milieu’ – to the adoption and perpetuation of sustainable clothing practices and associated textile craft skills (Willet et al. 2022). In the second half of this chapter I also turn to the affective dimension of beginners’ experiences of learning to sew using the hybrid and varied mix of on- and offline resources discussed above. My analysis identifies positive affect associated with the realisation of wearable garments and the learning of new skills; and negative affect associated with material aspects of the craft that the participants felt were outside their control (due either to skill or circumstance) and the need to make decisions (or exercising of personal agency) from positions of uncertainty. Having considered how the resources encountered by beginners contributed to this positive and negative affect, I conclude that, while the availability of abundant online resources makes home sewing appear possible and desirable, the reality of clothes construction and the skills it involves are more complex – embodied, sensory, material and contingent – than is popularly portrayed. Where the tacit knowledge and community aspects of craft learning are poorly recognised or reflected, it is to the detriment of beginners using predominantly online resources to learn sewing skills. Further, I suggest that common portrayals of home sewing as a joyful alternative means of clothing production that obscure the complexities of the craft skills involved, misleads beginners and may alienate those whose initial experiences are not so positive or who do not find a community they are comfortable sharing their travails with.

Seeing others grapple with material practices can be beneficial and instructive to those seeking to learn a craft, as Yother and Teratani (2022) suggest. My research also reflects the limitations of using pre-recorded video to learn a craft skill in the absence of community and two-way interaction. Opportunities to witness processes of trial and error are relatively rare in the edited content of sewing videos posted online. My research also highlights some particular challenges in conveying 3D material craft practices, such as those involved in clothes sewing, at full scale via a 2D screen-bound

medium. These findings are consistent with understandings of the social aspect of learning (Vygotsky 1978), the links between amateur craft and community found elsewhere in craft literature (e.g. Gauntlett 2018) and the research of others whose work involves in-person textile craft workshops (e.g. Twigger Holroyd 2013, Hackney et al. 2016). However, these findings question popular perceptions of how sewing skills are learnt by amateurs in a digital age – that is, primarily through watching videos online (Wood 2017).

In Chapter 7, I will address the ‘wearability’ of homemade clothes, associated here with positive affect. In Chapter 8, I will address the ‘materialities’ of home sewing, which can complicate and circumscribe beginners’ experiences of sewing, seen in this analysis to be associated with negative affect.

CHAPTER 7: WEARABILITY

7.1 Introduction to Chapter 7 Parts I & II

In Chapter 6 I identified that the positive emotions beginner sewists expressed in relation to their experiences of learning to sew were often connected to the materialisation of wearable garments. In this chapter I will explore what constitutes ‘wearability’ for beginner sewists and how sewing culture, context and resources support the making of clothes that maker-wearers consider to be wearable. In doing so, I will continue to build a rich picture of beginner sewists’ experiences of making clothes. I will also make connections between the understanding of wearability as explored in this chapter and the work of others approaching the design, making and wearing of clothes from different but related perspectives – including those of design and pattern making (Aldrich 2013), home sewing and consumption (Martindale 2017, Martindale and McKinney 2018), and the aesthetic and physical notion of fit explored through co-design in the Emotional Fit project (Townsend et al. 2017, Townsend & Sadkowska 2018).

In Part I of this chapter (Sections 7.2-7.5), I will explore aspects of sewing practice that affect the wearability of home-sewn clothes. Based on conversations with participants about the wearable garments they made, I identify six factors – fashion (here used to mean garment type and style), fabric, fit, form, functionality, and finish – that feature in these maker-wearers’ assessments of garment wearability. I will then explore some of the making experiences, processes and techniques, also discussed during ViEW encounters, that impact on the six wearability factors and affect the aesthetic desirability and physical efficacy of homemade clothes.

In Part II (Sections 7.6- 7.10), I will take a broader view of wearability, encompassing sensory and emotional (physiological and psychological) factors that are seen to be significant to clothing preferences and to the context-specific decisions women make about what to wear every day (Woodward 2007, Townsend & Sadkowska 2020). In this latter discussion I will focus on how the context within which beginners encounter

home sewing may help or hinder them in making clothes that are wearable in the sense that they are worn.

7.2 Wearability: Part I - Six wearable garments

Experienced sewist, designer and sewing book author Rosie Martin (quoted in Twigger Holroyd 2017: 87) describes amateur sewists looking at items they have made as if through a ‘magnifying glass’ and being hyper-critical of what would otherwise be acceptable garments. Although detailed levels of scrutiny were evident amongst the beginner sewists in this research – a tuck here, a hole there, a wonky line of stitching – the participants were mostly very happy to see fully formed garments materialise at all. In this section I will present examples of wearable garments made by Rasa, Steph, Wendy, Jenny and Sophie and highlight where the six interrelated wearability factors – fashion, fabric, fit, form, functionality, and finish – arise in their reflections.

Jenny’s pyjama shorts

Jenny’s first garment, a pair of pyjama shorts (Figure 19), was celebrated as wearable primarily because they fit and function as they were intended to: they were comfortable, held together and were preferred to longer pyjama bottoms, which had been one of Jenny’s most frequent clothing purchases. Although made from old sheet fabric, which she intended to dye, and with imperfections in their finish that Jenny (a self-identified perfectionist) well knew, these shorts were joyfully worn when they were first made.

So yeah, I was really shocked and excited about the fact that they actually fit! [...] There are some little bits I'm very proud of [laughs]. There are some terrible bits as well though. *Jenny (1)*

And then, you know, I have to say like, every time I put on my shorts, I do a little dance because I like I made these and they're so comfortable. And they're the nicest pyjama bottoms I've ever had. I think all of my pyjamas might end up being made out of old sheets! *Jenny (2)*



Figure 19 - Jenny's pyjama shorts made from sheet fabric.

Rasa's New Look skirt

Rasa's New Look skirt (Figure 20) was also wearable in the sense that it could be worn – it fit well enough and functioned as a skirt – and was made from a fabric that she liked. However, the skirt was unlikely to be worn regularly because the material qualities of the mid-weight woven cotton fabric used had been at odds with both the skirt pattern and the style of skirt that Rasa had envisaged making. Despite the skirt not suiting Rasa's current style preferences, she had worn it and been vocal amongst her friends about the fact that she had made it.

I have worn it out a couple of times. I guess the only issue is it's ... because of the drop waist, it's not something that I would wear a lot. I am so used to high waisted stuff now. So, when I wear a drop [-waisted skirt] I need to think about the top and I'm like, Oh needs to be a T-shirt, but how does the T-shirt go with the skirt, and how does this match? But I have worn it. It has been actually used, so that's nice. *Rasa* (3)



Figure 20 - Rasa's New Look skirt - waist detail.

Steph's 'lemon dress'

Like Rasa's skirt, Steph's 'lemon dress', from the Second Making Period, was the one item made during the project that she was happy to wear outside the house (Figure 21). In trying to achieve the style of dress she wanted within her existing skill level, Steph made a number of deviations from the pattern: she used a light 'scuba' fabric with a slight stretch, avoided putting in a zip and eliminated the gathers at the waist of the dress. The 'give' in the fabric allowed the garment to fit and function without these features and its non-fraying quality meant that errors in the construction (e.g. the application of the neck-facing to the inside of the garment leaving raw fabric edges exposed) were less consequential to the overall finish than they would have been in a woven fabric. Despite describing herself as 'very, very picky with anything that I do' (S1) Steph loved the dress and was happy to wear it.

But if I'm being very honest, I love it. There's not anything I'd change. There's a ... there was something at the back because you'll see, as we've seen in the videos, that I had to correct because ... I wouldn't walk around with that showing. So I kind of had to pleat the back to make it look neater. But I kind of made it. Yeah. I really do like it. It's going in the wardrobe. The Cleo dress went inside my sewing box. This is going in the wardrobe. So that's how much I like it. *Steph (2)*



Figure 21 - Steph's 'lemon dress': (a) neck facing detail, (b) dress back before adjustment, (c) dress front, (d) making adjustment to neaten back skirt seam (video still).

Wendy's Cuff Top and double gauze pyjama trousers

Unlike the other participants, Wendy made several wearable garments during the project. When comparing the Cuff Top she made in the Second Making Period with the pyjama trousers she had made in the first (Figure 22), the double-gauze fabric and the rough finish on the drawstring of her pyjama trousers featured in her assessment of their wearability. The Cuff Top, in comparison, had been much easier to sew and was something she was proud to share with friends on Instagram and wear out of the house.

But no, it's been a really good really good learning curve and it's been nice to show the pictures [of the Cuff Top] to people and they're like, that's like something you'd buy and it's like, yeah, it is actually. You know, it looks like a proper top. And like, you know my pyjama trousers did look like that as well but I knew that by the end, like the drawstring and things like that, maybe I over hemmed but now that I'm wearing them around the house, there's a certain element of like, these are comfy and that's fine. But this one [the Cuff Top] it's actually I will wear this out and that's a really good feeling. Yeah, it's been good. *Wendy (2)*



Figure 22 - Two garments: (a) Wendy's double gauze pyjama bottoms; (b) Wendy's Cuff Top.

Sophie's 'Stevie' dress

Sophie considered the second garment that she completed during the project – using a Tilly and the Buttons 'Stevie' Dress pattern (Figure 23) – to be wearable. She was surprised to have made a garment so successfully on only her second attempt. When she spoke about her plans to wear the dress once the weather was warm enough, Sophie emphasised its style and fit and the fabric she had chosen as things she particularly liked.

No, I haven't I wore it ... I just tried it on. Because I only finished it last night anyway. But yes, it's cold so ... I definitely will wear it. And I think I liked it because it was just like a nice cool dress for the summer. It's not fitted. It's nice cotton material and it's a good length. So I definitely will wear it. I don't know if it would go ... if it would go with tights so much ... I'll definitely wear that for work as well, because it's quite smart actually. And yeah, it's just nice, nice material as well. It was so hard picking material in that...in the shop because there's so many amazing fabrics but yeah, I quite like blue, so went for this one.

Sophie (3)



Figure 23 - Sophie's 'Stevie' Dress, (a) full length front; (b) back neck detail.

As illustrated in the examples above, a garment need not fully meet all of a sewist's hopes in order to be happily worn, at least temporarily or within the home. As a minimum, a home-sewn garment that can physically be worn and meets at least some of the maker-wearer's current aesthetic expectations may be considered wearable. The positive emotions – pride, excitement and increased confidence – bound up in these materialised garments was motivation enough for the beginners in this research to want to continue sewing for the duration of the project. However, as garment wearability is an important factor in the positive affect associated with home sewing (as identified in Section 6.6) it is worth expanding on the six wearability factors and how, based on these beginners' experiences, wearability may or may not be achieved. Having identified six wearability factors that feature in the above maker-wearer assessments of garment wearability, I will now expand on aspects of the beginners' making experiences that contribute to these six factors and in turn the wearability of their home-sewn clothes.

7.3 Fashion – Fabric – Fit

Below I will expand on the participants' experiences of making clothes that relate to the first three of the six wearability factors: fashion, fabric and fit. These three factors, which are fundamental to the design of garments and flat patterns (Aldrich 2013), may feature in the evaluation of shop-bought as well as homemade clothes. Martindale and McKinney's suggest, 'style, fabric, color and fit' are all features of a garment that sewists – as consumers with the option to sew – have more 'control' over (2018:176).

Fashion

The word 'fashion' is used as a wearability factor in this section to denote garment type and style. Decisions about what type and style of garment to make and what fabric to use are amongst the first decisions that beginner sewists – as emergent maker-wearers – must take.

Knowing what you like and will wear

Jenny, who described herself as someone who really dislikes shopping for clothes, found herself quickly confronted with the challenge of knowing what she was looking for in terms of both pattern style and fabric. Drawn to home sewing by disappointment with the ready-to-wear clothing on offer, Jenny soon realised that home sewing would actually involve *more* purchasing decisions.

this is so personal. There's no guide as to 'make this with this pattern'. It's more like make what you want out of whatever you want. So that makes it more difficult. *Jenny (1)*

As Wendy (3) observed, a lot of the indie patterns designed for beginners are 'quite boxy' styles with relatively little shaping. These styles are not everyone's first style preference or necessarily suited to all body types. Wendy was particularly conscious of this, being 5ft 1. In the Third Making Period Wendy made two 'wearable' skirts – one with an elasticated waistband (the Pocket Skirt from Peppermint Magazine) and another drop-waisted skirt from a Clothkits kit (which includes the garment outline and surface pattern printed on the fabric). Due to the low margin for error on the pattern for the Pocket Skirt, Wendy ended up using a thinner elastic in the waistband channel than the pattern had intended. This less-substantial waistband changed the garment's silhouette to one Wendy felt might be less stylish or flattering on her body. Having been attracted to the Clothkits skirt because it reduced the necessary preparation before cutting the fabric out, it was only after the skirt was made that Wendy realised that it was not really the style of skirt she would normally wear. The style issues Wendy encountered with both the Pocket and the Clothkits skirts, she concluded, might be resolved with a 'big belt' but she also reflected that most of the skirts in her wardrobe would have both a zip and some stretch to the fabric and that maybe these were the styles she should be looking for in future.

Steph, who started out using a Tilly and the Buttons pattern for a loose fitting 'Cleo' pinafore dress, later reflected that this was not really a style she would wear unless she was pregnant again. She had found it difficult to visualise herself in the pinafore

dress, whereas her subsequent make – the ‘Lemon Dress’ adapted from a New Look pattern – was more the style of dress she *would* wear.

Fabric

As indicated above, fabric type is integral to garment design (Aldrich 2013). The fabric used to make a garment impacts not only on the aesthetic appearance of a garment but on the fit, form, functionality and finish of the garment (all explored below). Fabric selection is therefore, in many ways, central to the wearability of home sewn clothes.

Suggested fabrics

In contrast to shopping for ready-made clothes, where combinations of style, pattern and colour are limited, home sewists face a wider range of judgements to make about both garment style and fabric. The list of suggested fabrics provided on pattern envelopes may mean little to beginners, who are unfamiliar with textile terminology. Furthermore, the fabric that is right for the style of garment they are making may not be the right choice for the beginner sewist. Steph chose to make her Tilly and the Buttons Cleo Pinafore Dress out of corduroy. This was one of the fabrics suggested on the pattern envelope, which promoted the pattern as ‘for beginners’ and ‘simple to sew’. In practice, sewing with corduroy for a first garment was anything but simple. After working with the fabric and struggling to complete the pinafore dress, Steph felt she had been ‘brave’ to start out using corduroy and summed up, ‘I don't think I'll be touching cord for a while, put it that way’ (S1). Wendy also followed the fabric suggestions for her Margot Pyjama Bottoms in the First Making Period but concluded that she probably would not have chosen double gauze had she ‘touched it beforehand’ (W1). Wendy found the fabric lovely and soft, and therefore good for the garment style, but the double layer added to the challenge of cutting and sewing fabric as a beginner.

Online sewing tutorials for items made without patterns may not dwell for long on the implications of the fabric being used or how its qualities contribute to the wearability of the item made, as Rasa realised during the Second Making Period.

But the idea was I've thought, oh, I'm going to go to the B&M fabric store and I'm going to see if I can find something that's really fally, really drapey, so that I could potentially make that skirt that I wanted before, following a different video, because it looks very easy. But what I missed out again, which is really funny, is that I was supposed to get a stretch fabric because she was using spandex in the video. But obviously, you know, I didn't think about that because I was just like, oh, I'm looking for drape. *Rasa (2)*

Shopping for fabric

Buying fabric can be overwhelming, especially for beginners with limited fabric knowledge. *Jenny* bought her first piece of fabric from a mobile haberdashery that serviced her local neighbourhood from the back of a van. Partly due to Covid-19, the sellers had stayed in the front of the van and she had not felt able to ask questions. *Jenny* sourced what she needed but had not enjoyed the experience. A subsequent visit to a bricks-and-mortar shop proved no better experience for her.

So, I literally just went in, did one lap, kind of went, I can't see anything I like, and was panicking. And then just left. *Jenny (2)*

Wendy also struggled to find anything she really liked in a traditional haberdashery. Having visited during a lunchbreak, she had settled for a gingham fabric as the best she felt they had to offer, only to realise later that it reminded her of a dress she had worn in junior school. Furthermore, the fabric did not have a clear right and wrong side, which she felt would be important to put the garment pieces together correctly. The gingham fabric was set aside while Wendy moved online to find an alternative that she would be happier with. Although providing greater choice, Wendy found that online fabric purchasing can be fraught with other problems including unclear fabric quality and dimensions, price transparency and the veracity of fabric descriptions.

But so many, I kept finding like, okay, this is how much I need, and this is the price ... Oh, they don't have enough of it. And, or actually, the price I thought it was they're talking about quarter metres instead of ... you know, so there were

just so many discrepancies. I was like, oh, I've really found it. No I haven't, no I haven't. *Wendy (1)*

And then when I thought I'd messed up the fabric I was like just Googling black linen straightaway just going, What can I get right now that can do this. And then reading comments and things of people going 'this isn't linen!'. This isn't linen by the way, it was like, okay, I don't want that. *Wendy (3)*

Advice on the fabrics used for making garments from specific patterns and the places from which other sewists have sourced their fabric are amongst the many things that beginner sewists look for in blogs and online sewing communities. Both Jenny and Wendy spoke about harvesting fabric information from Instagram and other online spaces. Several of the Phase I interviewees also spoke seeking fabric recommendations this way.

Fit

Fit, along with fashion and fabric, is pivotal to the wearability of home-sewn clothes as it links both to the designerly aspects of making that contribute to the overall look and feel of the garment on the body (fashion and fabric) and to the makerly skills involved in garment construction (including form and functionality, explored below).

Body measurement & size selection

The first fit decision that beginner sewists must make is which size to select, from what are usually multi-size patterns. Making the 'right' decision on this requires accurate body measurements. Depending on how the body is measured, it is easy to produce widely differing results, which can sow seeds of doubt at the start of the making process – as Wendy, Jenny and Rasa all experienced. There is plenty of advice online about how to take accurate body measurements but there is still a degree of judgement in the size selection process, as personal measurement and size charts on pattern envelopes may not correlate and people frequently find themselves 'between sizes' (W3). Furthermore, the amount of pattern ease – an allowance added to body

measurements for design or fit (see Glossary in Appendix 17) – mean actual garment dimensions differ from those of the body, as Wendy discovered.

I came out as a large on the measurements. But when I looked at how that translated into sort of sizes, it seemed way too large, so I went for medium. But I think actually, I could probably try a small, depending on the fabric and see how that fits. But yeah, just went with medium thinking that's probably what I normally am. *Wendy (2)*

It makes pragmatic sense to err on the side of caution when selecting the pattern size as it is easier to reduce than increase the size of a garment. But it is hard for beginner sewists to judge how the size of cut fabric pieces will relate to the look and fit of the final garment once the material in the seam allowances is subtracted in the making process. If garment pieces are judged to be bigger than needed, beginner sewists can end up without a guide as to where their seam line should be, as Steph found when sewing her Cleo pinafore.

I remember thinking when I was sewing, it doesn't matter if there's quite a big width [excess on the seam allowance] because I can cut that off. I think I really beared in mind ... that it probably will be a bit bigger. So just don't worry about it, you know. So probably, I think I've cut my pattern, and then probably just gone ... not followed it as such when I've been sewing. *Steph (1)*

If the decision is taken to reduce the size of a piece by taking it in at the side seams (as Rasa considered doing on her New Look skirt and Steph did with her Cleo Pinafore) then the shape of the pattern piece and so the fit of the final garment can become distorted, with implications for the form, fit and overall style of the garment, and so its wearability.

Pattern alteration

By far the most challenging fit issue for beginner sewists (and perhaps home sewists in general) is that their bodies often do not conform to standard size charts. While the

possibility of better fitting clothes is a major motivating factor for many beginners, the technical skill and time involved in achieving a good fit can be an unwelcome revelation, as Rasa realised during the project:

obviously fit will be the next thing I probably focus on eventually because she [Evelyn Wood – one of Rasa’s favoured vintage sewing vloggers] mentioned this herself and I realised it myself as well just because it's pattern pieces I cut out myself, they're still pattern pieces that are the same for everyone. It's not just gonna magically fit me best and better. It's literally off the rack it's just I put it together myself, which is sort of a silly, interesting, logical mistake that people do with sewing. *Rasa* (1)

So yeah, I think the main lesson is just fitting is a lot more involved and difficult than you think, even when you already think it's difficult. *Rasa* (3)

It seems that the further people’s physical dimensions differ from the ‘standard’, the more the body is discussed. Of the five Phase II participants, Steph spoke least about her body shape/size. Sophie and Wendy, who described themselves as ‘tall’ and ‘short’ respectively, did not engage in any pattern alterations before making their garments but later spoke about making alterations and preferring a different fit – shortening pyjama trousers and ideally wanting a camisole top to be longer. Jenny and Rasa, who described themselves respectively as having ‘quite a big bust’ (J2) and being ‘very top heavy’ (R1), both opted to explore the process of making a full bust adjustment (FBA) to patterns during the project. FBA is a common topic of discussion in online sewing communities (including some for whom this is a unifying interest – e.g. the Curvy Sewing Collective) but receives limited, if any, mention in pattern instructions. Those with ‘non-standard’ bust measurements wanting to sew in order to have tops or dresses that fit their particular proportions are confronted with a juggling act between written pattern instructions and online resources, as Jenny and Rasa both found.

Amongst the wealth of online content covering this topic, beginner sewists encounter conflicting advice (e.g. on where and how to measure) and tutorials that show only

part of the process or demonstrate on garments with darts in different places from the pattern they are trying to alter. The technical nature of pattern adjustments of this kind can be either satisfying or off-putting, depending on the individual. Jenny described her attempt at making the pattern adjustments as ‘fun’ and felt some satisfaction from having reached this ‘little milestone’ (J2) in the process of learning to sew: ‘basically it's just like doing calculations and I like that kind of thing’ (J2). Rasa, on the other hand, found trying to figure out pattern adjustments a step too far.

Yeah, it's a lot more mathematical and ... geometry stuff than I ever prepared to do after I finished school. *Rasa* (3)

I was very much prepared to do all the moving, the hinges and the moving down. That made sense to me because it's flat. And the moment they [online instructions] were like, right, so your apex point has moved and it's on you to decide how you do the dart, whether you need to stay in that position or you want it to move ... how the dart moves. I was like, Oh, my God! With a dart, it takes away thingie [fabric] and it makes a tent and then how do I ... I couldn't visualise ... there's so many steps down the way that you have to go through and also other variables. I was like, oh this is where we're clocking out! *Rasa* (3)

7.4 Form – Functionality – Finish

Having looked briefly at experiences relating to fashion, fabric and fit, I will now focus on the second three of the six wearability factors: form, functionality and finish. These factors relate most directly to the maker-wearer's role in the garment construction process, and all link to common sewing practices and techniques that beginners encounter in pattern instructions when first making clothes (see Glossary in Appendix 17).

Form

For a garment to be worn it must be formed in such a way that the interior space will accommodate, and allow for movement of, the human body. The cut and construction details that account for this are designed into well drafted patterns. Pattern notches,

staystitching and darts – all encountered by the participants involved in this study and discussed in ViEW encounters – are all aspects of pattern design and garment construction that help to bring garment pieces together into a 3D (wearable) form. These aspects of garment making go unnoticed (or are absent) in ready-to-wear clothing and so are often encountered by beginner sewists for the first time as unfamiliar language in pattern instructions.

Pattern notches

Pattern notches on home sewing patterns provide a guide to the alignment of pattern pieces with one another (Figure 24). Because the purpose and value of the notch is rarely apparent to beginner sewists, I highlighted them during the introductory Phase II workshops. I hoped that if the participants had *heard* of notches, they would be less bemused by them in their first sewing patterns. I explained that it is easy to miss out notches when tracing patterns or cutting out garment pieces, especially as a beginner. Furthermore, if notches are not consistently mentioned in pattern instructions, they can be overlooked during the making process. In DIY Cut & Sew tutorials, these guides are usually dispensed with altogether. The relative simplicity of the garment shapes in beginners' patterns means the absence of notches, or attention to them, may not be overly consequential. However, misalignment of fabric can have a significant impact on the aesthetic and physical wearability of a garment, as was the case for Steph's Cleo Pinafore mentioned above. Having tested out the pattern using sheet fabric and noted that the dress was going to be quite loose, Steph did not use the notches to align her side seams or the facing pieces. As a result, although still technically wearable (worn only once at home amongst family before being returned to the sewing box), the dress was flatter (less 3D) than the pattern design intended and was slightly distorted around the sides where the facing was sewn.

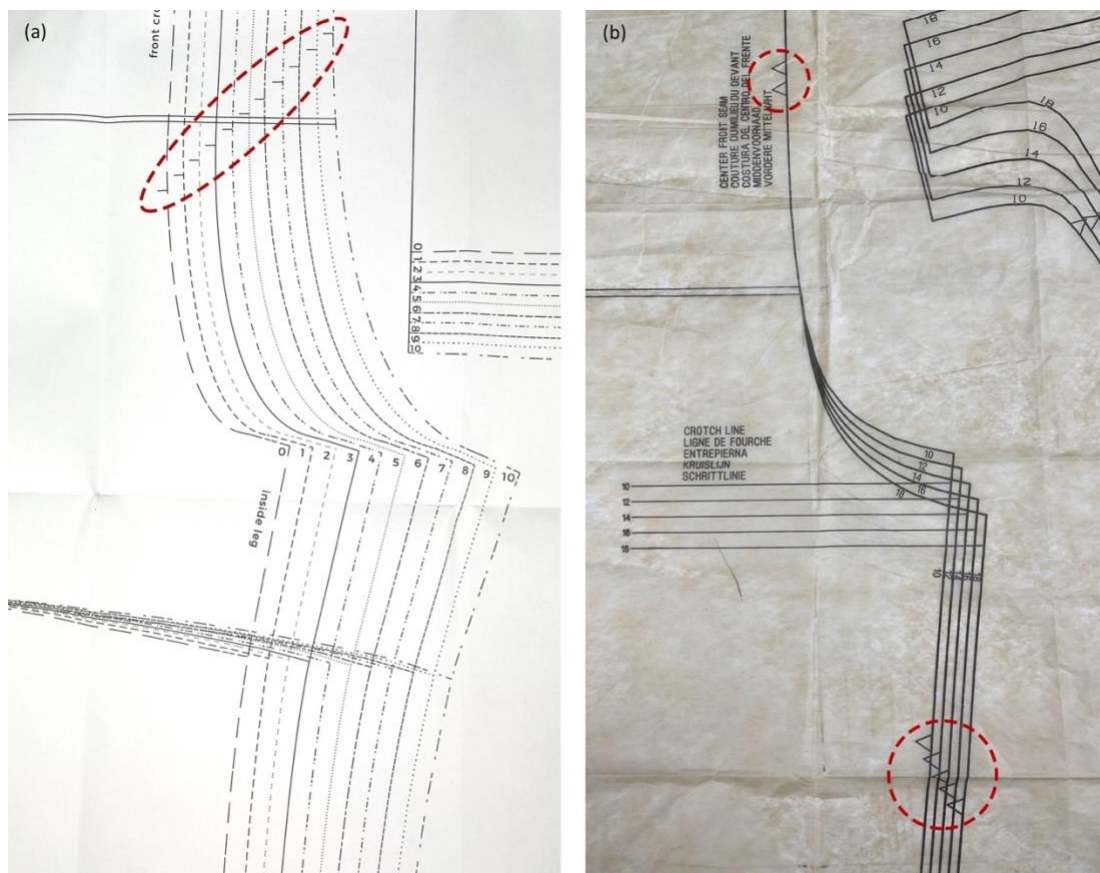


Figure 24 - Notches highlighted in red dotted ring on: (a) Tilly and the Buttons 'Jaimie' pyjama trouser pattern and (b) Simplicity K1620 pant pattern.

Where attention is paid to pattern notches, they can provide welcome reassurance when they match up; this can be something of a surprise (and delight).

when it came to actually putting the pattern pieces together and matching up the notches I was like, ... 'Oh my God, my notches match' as if it was like, you know, a fluke or something and then I realised well, no, actually they're supposed to match! Jenny (1)

While making the bodice of her 'Lemon Dress' during the Second Making Period, Steph paid greater attention to notches and felt this had made a difference to the quality of the outcome. However, she later lost sight of the notches and the clues they might have provided when joining the bodice and skirt together, contributing to the alteration needed to neaten the back of the skirt by adding a pleat.

Staystitching

Staystitching is another technique that the participants often encountered in the patterns they worked with. This technique contributes to the successful forming – and therefore the wearability – of homemade garments by limiting the risk of fabric moving or stretching out of shape, especially around curves, during the making process. By doing so, staystitching aids the proper alignment and distribution of fabric pieces relative to one another (between notches) to ensure that fabric and volume within the garment are positioned as needed to accommodate the moving body.

Rasa encountered staystitching for the first time in the instructions for the skirt she was making from a commercial pattern in the First Making Period. As beginners commonly do when encountering unfamiliar terms, Rasa searched online for more information. The advice she found helpfully guided her to aim for a stitch line at 1.3 centimetres, within a 1.5 centimetre seam allowance, to shorten her stitch length, and to make the line of stitching in two halves (again to avoid distortion). On returning to the pattern instructions, Rasa was able to make sense of this information and proceed. However, the instructions (on- and offline) cannot account for the difficulty of sewing accurately at a precise distance from the raw edge of a piece of fabric, particularly around a curved edge. The line of staystitching that Rasa sewed was neither as curved nor as consistent as the instructions intended or she had hoped. Being an inconsistent distance from the raw edge of the fabric, the resulting line of staystitching had not necessarily added to the stability and evenness of the curve and was also visible on the outside of the finished skirt. While the resulting skirt was still wearable and had been worn out of the house, Rasa described the stitching at the waist at different times as both ‘ugly’ and ‘horrendous’ (R2) – although this stitching is barely visible in Figure 20 (Section 7.2 above).

Darts

Darts, like facings (see Section 6.5 and Finishing below), are a step that beginners often find hard to understand from pattern instructions alone. Rasa, Steph and Sophie all encountered darts in the items they were making and searched immediately online for

more information. Steph spoke about watching and rewatching a video to understand which way to fold and sew the fabric and how to finish the darts at the tip, which were both common uncertainties. When preparing to sew the bodice of her dress, Steph turned the fabric one way and then the other to see for herself which way the folded fabric should be positioned before she pinned it (Figure 25b).

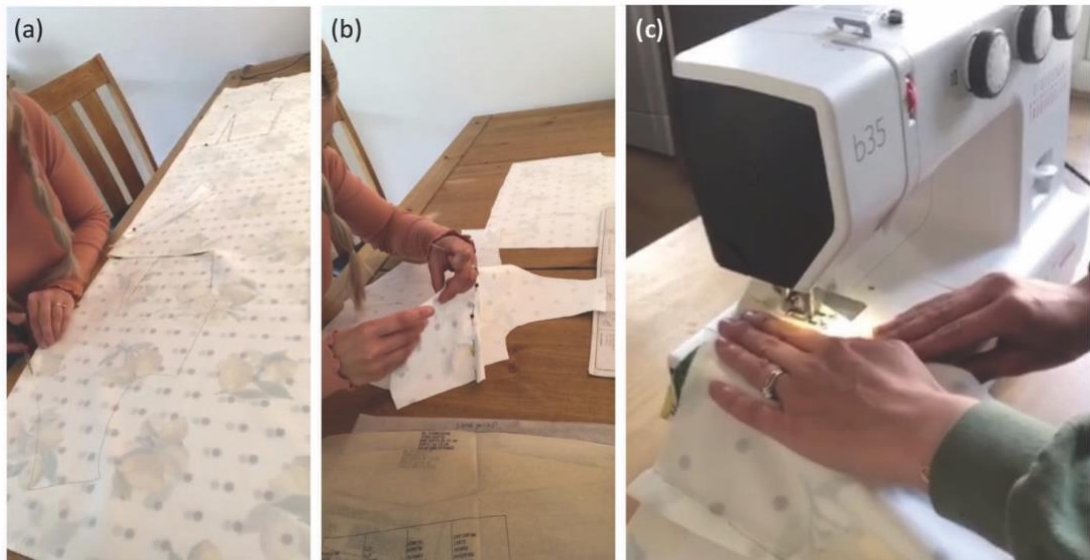


Figure 25 - Steph working on the bodice darts of her 'lemon dress', (a) cutting out fabric with bodice outline and darts marked on it; (b) folding fabric to pin darts in place; (c) sewing bodice darts.

Rasa sewed darts in her skirt tentatively in the First Making Period, having not precisely transferred their positioning from pattern to fabric before doing so. She had a good understanding of the purpose of the darts (to create shape) but still found it hard to visualise them from flat to 3D. Later, when working on a bodice, Rasa's research into the technique yielded multiple sources of information that focused on different aspects of dart sewing, including how to finesse the sewing of the dart tip and how to press the newly shaped piece over a folded tea towel. Unlike Steph, who had gone straight to a Tilly and the Buttons 'How to' and rewatched it, Rasa, who enjoyed watching Vintage Inspired sewing content, often encountered more detail than she could put into practice. The sewing of the dart tip was something she had really focused on and tried several times to perfect but the techniques she had picked up in the videos, she realised, were perhaps more advanced than she needed. All three

women (Rasa, Steph and Sophie) re-sewed some of their darts more than once to arrive at a result they were happy with.

Functionality

For a home-sewn item to be functional and wearable beyond an initial ‘try on’, the pieces that have been joined must hold securely together. Seam allowances and backtacking both have implications for the structural integrity – and so, the functionality – of the garments made by home sewists. Again, these aspects of garment making are ones that often go unnoticed (or differ) in shop-bought clothes, and which beginner sewists only become aware of when trying to make clothes for themselves.

Seam allowances

The fabric of the seam allowance acts as a buffer between the stitched seam and the fabric’s raw edge, ensuring the garment pieces hold together. It can be hard for beginner sewists to maintain the level of machine control required to achieve an even seam allowance. Too narrow a seam allowance and the fabric might pull apart – as Wendy found after re-joining the two halves of her Pocket Skirt front panel with a very narrow seam allowance. Too large a seam allowance can have implications for fit, as Sophie felt might have happened on her Camisole Top. The raw edges of seam allowances are commonly ‘finished’ in some way, either using a zigzag stitch or an overlocker. As the seams in most basic garments are stitched in such a way that the seam allowances end up on the inside, it is not always obvious to beginners why the finishing of seam edges might be desirable. Whether and how seams are finished is partly an aesthetic choice but, depending on the fabric used, can also be critical to the structural integrity, and therefore the functionality and durability, of the garment, e.g. in use and laundering. Having opted not to finish the seam allowances of a linen skirt, Phase I interviewee Elly described her disappointment when the skirt emerged from the washing machine unwearable and looking like a ‘ball of string’.

Beginners’ uncertainties surrounding the ‘finishing’ of seam allowances are increased because the step is either not mentioned (as in many commercial pattern instructions)

or is illustrated and/or demonstrated in online videos using an overlocker (as is often the case for the indie pattern brands). It is common for these written instructions to suggest those without an overlocker (i.e. most beginners) zigzag their seam allowance instead – but may provide no further detail about the size of zigzag stitch to use or the positioning of the stitches in relation to the seam. When making pyjama bottoms in the First Making Period both Jenny and Wendy struggled to finish their seam edges following Tilly and the Buttons instructions that guided them to trim their seam allowances before zigzagging. The level of precision (machine speed control and fabric handling) required to do this around a curved edge made it hard for both women to complete this step in a way that was either neat or fully effective.

Backtacking

Backtacking – a few stitches sewn back and forth over each other at the beginning and end of machine-stitched seams to stop them coming undone – is another small step in the sewing process that is easily forgotten or overlooked by beginners. Again, it is a step that will not necessarily be mentioned in pattern instructions, and as such is an aspect of the ‘assumed knowledge’ which, as we saw in Section 5.3, beginner sewists criticise sewing instructions for. Unsecured seams can easily undermine an item of homemade clothing that would otherwise have been wearable and durable in use. I had taken care to demonstrate starting and finishing a seam during the introductory workshops. Nonetheless Jenny (and likely others) often found she would forget to backtack out of excitement to start sewing. As the beginners encountered different techniques in the course of their sewing activities and gleaned information from online sources, questions often arose about steps like backtacking and when they might or might not be necessary.

Another thing I find interesting actually is backstitching because some people always mention it. And mention it almost as a point and say oh, in this thing you want to backstitch both for the front and the back [at the beginning and end]. Sometimes they don't mention it at all. So the logic behind backstitching for me is ... even though I understand it, sometimes I'm like, Do you just do it at the end, do you do it always at the both times? Rasa (2)

Rasa's uncertainty related to the sewing of darts on a bodice, which are best secured with a backtack at the side seam but tied off at the dart tip for a better finish. She had found conflicting sources of advice and demonstration of this step online. Jenny asked if backtacking was necessary when topstitching and Wendy when hemming. Due to their lack of experience, beginner sewists may have no reason to differentiate between a structural seam (one that holds two pieces of a garment together and requires backtacking) and other lines of stitching where backtacking is either not necessary (when stay stitching) or inadvisable (such as at the tip of a dart).

Finish

The finish of a garment – the 'neatness' or otherwise of its appearance – is an important factor in whether an item of homemade clothing will be worn. For self-identified perfectionists like Sophie the link between neatness and wearability can be very clear.

I'm a bit of a perfectionist. I like things very nice and neat...if it wasn't neat, I know I would be less inclined to wear it. *Sophie* (3)

While many aspects of a neat or 'acceptable' finish relate to the skill and accuracy with which a garment is constructed, some – such as facings – are integral to the design of the garment, and therefore are embedded in the pattern and its instructions.

Facings

Facings are another aspect of garment design and construction that may differ between homemade and shop-bought clothes. As we saw in Section 6.5, the application of facings is an aspect of clothes making that the beginners in this research found particularly challenging for two reasons. Firstly, facings often include a layer of interfacing which has to be heat-bonded to the fabric to stabilise it before the facing piece is attached to the rest of the garment. Pattern instructions do not necessarily provide any detail on this, leaving the beginner to find out for themselves what they need to buy and how to apply it. Those looking online for more information might find

advice that is contradictory and have to decide between, or sometimes combine, suggested approaches.



Figure 26 - Hand cam video stills showing my hands as screen-shared during a conversation in Steph's second ViEW encounter about facings.

The second challenge that facings present for beginners is the orientation and position in which they are sewn. As already discussed in Section 6.5, all those who had encountered facings were initially flummoxed by the fact that the facing piece is first stitched on the outside of the garment before being turned to the inside where it covers the raw edges of the fabric. While the purpose of facings is to neaten and add structure to garment openings (e.g. neck, waist, armholes), inexpertly applied facings can impact greatly on the form as well as the finish of a garment. Some garment patterns, particularly those from indie brands, use bias binding instead of facings as a finishing technique. Jenny, who encountered binding rather than facings during this research study, similarly found the instructions for applying the bindings difficult to interpret. Having not been able to make sense of the instructions for her Scout Tee, Jenny asked me pre-emptively how binding *should* work. When I demonstrated this step, it became clear that Jenny had found the instruction for the application of the binding counter-intuitive in much the same way as Steph, Sophie and Wendy had

when encountering facings. This misunderstanding had made it unclear to Jenny which pieces of the fabric should be trimmed and which would be turned through to encase her raw fabric edges.

Understitching

Understitching, used to keep facings in place (i.e. fully inside the garment and invisible on the outside), is yet another unfamiliar term encountered by beginner sewists.

Understitching can be fiddly, as the pieces of fabric to be stitched (seam allowance and facing) are already joined together and so will not easily lie flat as the line of understitching is sewn. Beginners often find the pattern instructions for understitching difficult to interpret, which leads them to look for supplementary information online or alternatively skip this step altogether. Sophie, who skipped the understitching on her first garment (the Camisole) could really see the difference understitching made when she did include this step on her second garment (the 'Stevie' Dress), the neatness of which she was very pleased with (Figure 27).



Figure 27 - Understitching holding neck facing in place around inside neckline of Sophie's 'Stevie' Dress, visible on right of picture close to fabric edge.

When Jenny asked about understitching, she read her ‘beginner’ pattern instructions to me to explain why they were so hard to grasp. When I showed her what the instructions meant and *why* understitching was helpful, she immediately saw the value of this technique for the finish of a garment.

that's really cool because, um, I've seen that happen on clothes that I've bought, where it starts to roll, and it's really frustrating. So that's good to know that there's a way of stopping it happening. *Jenny (2)*

Wendy also saw the value of understitching. Having seen the difference understitching made to her Cuff Top, Wendy used the technique on her Clothkits skirt during the Third Making Period, even though it was not included in the instructions. She also proudly explained the technique to her sister – ‘as if I’d invented it’ (W3) – including the reason for doing it which she had learnt from an Evelyn Wood (Vintage Inspired) tutorial.

Pinning and pressing

Less technical aspects of sewing practice, such as pinning fabric before sewing or pressing seams after stitching them, are amongst those mentioned only intermittently in pattern instructions. How to perform these actions and the value doing so might have for the finish of a garment are not immediately clear to sewing beginners. Like other steps that are not fully understood, these parts of the sewing process are often skipped or disregarded – both by beginners and by those in some of the Enthusiast and DIY Cut & Sew videos they watch. However, the value of actions such as pinning and pressing became more apparent to some participants as a result of their sewing experience, as Rasa highlighted when reflecting on what she had learnt through her experience during the project.

Because obviously sewing requires so much more preparation if you want it to fit nicely, from actually finishing seams to pressing them every time you do one. And it's something every beginner goes, oh surely I don't actually have to do that. But then like actually I need to. *Rasa (3)*

As several of the participants noted during the project, these aspects of sewing practice make a surprising difference to the final appearance of a garment and its wearability beyond the initial thrill of having made something that can be worn.

7.5 Making wearable clothes

As seen above, there are many different practices and techniques encountered by beginners that impact on the wearability of the garments they make. Some of these practices and techniques reflect differences between homemade and shop-bought clothes. Some are mentioned only intermittently in pattern instructions which, for brevity, guide sewists step by step through the piecing together of a garment and not moment by moment through the whole process of making it. For simplicity, many Enthusiast and DIY Cut & Sew tutorials skip some of these processes and techniques altogether. The purpose and material consequences of these aspects of garment making are, therefore, not always evident to sewing beginners through the resources they use or the online content they watch.

Garments sewn quickly, without attention to these processes and techniques, may be wearable (or not – see Rasa’s two experiences with DIY Cut & Sew instructions in Appendix 16). They may serve their purpose by demonstrating clothes making to be possible, offering a sense of inclusion in a current cultural trend or a sense of having some ‘effect on the world’ (Dissanayake 1995). However, given the importance of garment wearability to the positive affect associated with learning to sew clothes (as identified in Section 6.6), it seems unlikely that people would continue sewing clothes if the time spent was repeatedly unrewarded with something new to wear. Some participants who had skipped steps or strayed from instructions on their earlier makes started to trust the patterns more, use techniques such as pinning and pressing more often or add a process to a subsequent make for the neatness of finish they could see it might bring. These techniques are tried-and-tested methods for achieving more objectively (physically and aesthetically) wearable results. Whether beginner sewists learn ‘how’ *and* ‘why’ these aspects of garment construction impact on the form, functionality and finish of the garment they make may depend, to a large extent, on whether or not they continue to sew. Whatever their early experiences of sewing,

those who do continue to sew beyond a first make are likely to encounter the processes and techniques highlighted here sooner or later. In Part II of this chapter I will focus more on the subjective aspects of ‘wearability’, that impact on whether or not a garment *is worn*, beyond the initial thrill of it being realised as an item that *can be worn*.

7.6 Wearability: Part II – The most sustainable clothes are the ones we wear

Wearability is central to whether or not homemade clothes are sustainable, in the sense of whether or not they are worn. As highlighted in Section 5.2, people are often motivated to try making their own clothes because of associations that are made between DIY construction and sustainability. But, as Fletcher (2016) emphasises, the sustainability of clothes is in their use. Homemade clothes that are not wearable, or that do not pass into regular use, are not, in and of themselves, a sustainable alternative to shop-bought clothes. As identified in Section 6.6, the making of ‘wearable’ clothes is linked to positive affect for home sewists, which can motivate continued practice with reinforcing positive impact on sewists’ skill levels and the likely wearability of clothes made in future. As Twigger Holroyd (2017) identifies, feelings about homemade clothes, which determine whether they are worn or not, can be complex (2017). Most, if not all, beginners make and test at least some garments that are destined not to be worn because they fall short on one or more of the six aspects of wearability already explored in Part I. Assessments of wearability from a more sensory and emotional perspective – i.e. what it feels physiologically and psychologically good to wear – will vary between individuals and may differ over time. As one of the knitters quoted by Twigger Holroyd suggests, what was initially seen as a ‘win’ for having neck and armholes in the right place might later be looked upon with ‘a more critical eye’ (2017: 84). As Woodward (2007) highlights, decisions about what will and will not be worn are always context specific. In this section I will focus on how the context within which beginners encounter home sewing and the resources they use to support their making practices may impact on the wearability of the clothes they make, beyond the initial thrill of having made them.

7.7 Personal style & agency

As we saw in Part I, when searching for ideas of what to make, beginners are looking to identify the kind of garment they *want* to make and *can make* at their current level of skill, and that they *will wear*. The patterns and instructions available for home sewing change over time more slowly than shop-bought fashions. Many patterns for similar garments are available across different pattern brands and/or circulate secondhand. The newer indie pattern brands gradually add new styles to existing collections, which are otherwise slow to change. Popular makes with social media hashtags that receive multiple mentions in online sewing communities (e.g. the Ogden Cami from True Bias, the Zadie Jumpsuit from Paper Theory Patterns, the Winslow Culottes from Helen’s Closet Patterns, or the Assembly Line Cuff Top that Wendy made in the Second Making Period) become part of the style lexicon for committed home sewists. DIY Cut & Sew videos, demonstrating the making of garments without professionally drafted patterns, appear to be more trend led – currently lots of cottage-core Shirred gingham dresses – which also remain available online long after the fashion ‘moment’ has passed. The participants’ choices of what to make appeared to be guided more by what they thought they would wear than they were led by trends. However, as we saw in Part I, knowing what they wanted to make and would wear was not always straightforward.

In his exposition on the *Psychopolitics of Fashion*, Otto von Busch (2020) highlights a distinction between positive and negative freedom which originates with Isaiah Berlin. The distinction, as von Busch explains, is between positive freedom, understood as a ‘freedom to’ act with agency, and negative freedom, understood as a ‘freedom from’ the discomfort of having to take full responsible for our actions (Berlin 1958 cited in von Busch 2020). In the context of fashion, where we must all select clothes to wear every day, positive freedom (‘freedom to’ act) places responsibility on us to behave (or dress) in certain ways. Psychoanalyst Erich Fromm suggests that this responsibility puts ‘a lot of psychological and introspective pressure on people’ (Fromm 1941/1994 paraphrased in von Busch 2020: 22). In contrast, negative freedom channelled through the ‘narrow notions of individualistic consumerism’ may enable us to feel safer in our decisions (von Busch 2020: 22). Straying too far from the norms of a mainstream

consumerist society can put us at risk of humiliation or alienation. As Twigger Holroyd puts it, drawing on Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's *The Meaning of Things* (1981), 'if our possessions are too unusual they cease to connect us with those around us' (2017: 98).

For beginner sewists such as Jenny, who are drawn to home sewing in part because they feel badly served by the clothes available to them in the shops, the 'freedom to' act is two sided. It is the hope Jenny feels when she thinks about things she might one day be able to make but also the unexpected burden of responsibility to know what she wants. As Twigger Holroyd highlights, the clothes available ready-to-wear in shops have been 'validated' by fashion industry professionals (2017: 99). In the absence of this validation – as we negotiate our self-image 'based on our *imagining* of how others appraise our appearance' – the prospect of making our own clothes can increase anxiety along with the number of decisions that must be made (2017:101 original emphasis, see also Woodward 2007). The origins of paper sewing patterns in the nineteenth century and their marketing over the last century and a half have been based on the capacity of such patterns to offer home sewists access to the latest styles (Spanabel Emery 1999, 2020, Hackney 1999). Indie patterns, although frequently sold as PDF files and relatively slow to change over time, are the latest incarnation of the paper sewing pattern. These patterns, with their named designers and associated online content and communities, provide home sewists some reassurance that what they are making is 'acceptable'. But the home sewist must still match pattern to fabric in a combination of their choosing. In these combinations lurk the physical affordances of fabrics (see below) and the semiotics of fashion, both of which affect how the resulting garment might turn out or be 'read' by others in any particular context (Woodward 2007).

These aspects of our clothes – their material qualities and the cultural work they do – may not be ones that amateur sewists have previously paid such conscious attention to. As described in Section 7.3, Wendy stepped back from using gingham partly because it reminded her of a school dress she had worn as a child: the memory prompted some doubt. While The Assembly Line Cuff Top pattern is popular with

home sewists and gingham fabric has recently been ‘on trend’, the pattern and fabric together might in combination ‘say’ something different. Following other people online to glean fabric tips for a specific make can reduce the risk of getting fabric choices ‘wrong’ (either stylistically or in terms of fabric qualities) – but only once sewists have found their style niche within the wealth of pattern options.

Many of the indie pattern brands that are popular with beginners – including the Tilly and the Buttons brand which was most frequently referenced by Phase I interviewees and Phase II participants – have a youthful aesthetic in terms of garment style, which may contribute to the impression of home sewing as a youthful pursuit (Fletcher 2016; Twigger Holroyd 2017). Interestingly, it was Wendy and Jenny – both women in their early forties – who discussed personal style the most, perhaps suggesting that the younger participants felt better catered for, more confident or perhaps less self-conscious or fearful of judgement as they started trying to make their own clothes. In the In-Person Workshop, as participants leafed through various sewing books, Wendy was drawn to a book from the *Maker’s Atelier* (Tobin 2017) because it showed models of a slightly older age group (Figure 28). Just as in the ready-to-wear market, which the older women in the Emotional Fit project felt failed them in terms of style (Townsend et. al 2017), the market for home sewing patterns – particularly those aimed at beginners – is skewed towards a younger audience. As a consequence the positive ‘freedom to’ act may become more fraught for those not fitting easily into that dominant demographic.



Figure 28 - The Maker's Atelier: The Essential Collection – Sewing with Style – Francis Tobin (2017)

The uncertainties surrounding self-presentation described above are by no means limited to those who choose to sew their own clothes. At a recent enactment event as part of Amy Twigger Holroyd's Fashion Fictions project (in which I was a participant)

two participants voiced the sartorial challenges that many people face well into adult life. One participant lamented why it had taken her so long to work out what suited her in style terms (Fashion Fictions 2023). Another declared that the outfit she was wearing, and wore different versions of daily, were not the clothes she *wanted* to wear. Those who choose to make their own clothes give themselves the opportunity to explore these questions – ‘what suits *me*’ and ‘what do I *want* to wear’ – more fully. In doing so they become more ‘responsible’ for their own style and decisions about what is wearable for them, from both a physiological and psychological (sensory and emotional) perspective. Even with a wealth of online resources available to home sewists, our current fashion culture does not equip us well for this responsibility. Matching pattern to fabric to create a wearable garment requires a designerly sense of colour, form, pattern, and balance that must be gleaned from an environment saturated with images of clothes of all kinds.

As the fashion landscape has morphed over the last two decades, there is ‘no longer one dominant fashion’ (von Busch 2020: 17). Instead, a profusion of differing styles spill forth all at once (ibid.). As von Busch argues, far from freeing us, this expansion creates greater uncertainty for those seeking to express themselves, or even just feel comfortable and confident, in what they wear. Contrast this predicament with the style narratives that Tulloch (2020) and Young (2020) relay of freehand pattern cutters from the African diaspora, who cut garments direct from the fabric to suit themselves, or the working class women interviewed by Moseley (2001), who copied and adapted patterns to recreate ‘film star style’ as young women in the 1950s and 1960s. The women referenced in these studies grew up in different cultures at a similar time. What they have in common is the ability to ‘read’ clothes from a makerly as well as a designerly perspective – that of knowing clothes from the inside out – and their ability to use their technical and embodied knowledge to fit their individual body and sense of style. These lived experiences serve as a powerful reminder that ‘people have, within living memory, behaved differently’ (Fletcher & Tham 2019: 35).

It seems that a desire for the kind of agency evident in the above examples is one motivation that draws people to home sewing, but the extent of designerly judgement

and makerly skill required to make enduringly wearable clothes is only revealed through engaging with the craft. Some beginner sewists such as Steph and Rasa have clear ideas of the kind of clothes they want to make but are challenged by bringing vision and fabric together in a wearable 3D form. Others are less sure of what they want or whether what they have made really works for them, as was the case for Jenny and Wendy respectively. Some of the uncertainties and anxieties experienced by the participants in this project would be mitigated by greater design awareness, style confidence or fabric knowledge. Resources aimed at promoting individual pattern brands and vloggers' videos do not necessarily foreground these aspects of sewing skill and judgement.

7.8 The affordances of fabric

As we have seen, the wearability of homemade clothes is partly dependent on the correspondence between garment pattern and fabric type. The style and shape of garments and the qualities of the fabrics used to make them are integral to the design of clothing and sewing patterns (Aldrich 2013). Fabric qualities – characteristics including weight, thickness, drape, shear and stretch (ibid: 8) – impact the affordances of the fabric and how it will form into a garment, handle in the process of construction and function in wear. As such, they affect the physiological and psychological wearability of the resulting garment. Those unfamiliar with making clothes will not necessarily appreciate the relationship of fabric structure, weight and drape to the style and fit of clothing or the crucial difference between stretch and non-stretch fabrics. I briefly touched on fabric qualities when highlighting the fabric recommendations that come with sewing patterns during the introductory workshops. Both Wendy and Rasa showed some awareness of the significance of fabric type to the making of clothes but had little technical or embodied knowledge to guide their fabric selection. When participants spoke about their fabric choices these were mostly based on surface qualities (colour or print) rather than the material qualities that affect how the finished garment would look and feel on the body.

Confidence in fabric sourcing, as we saw in Part I, is a challenge for beginner sewists. Despite wearing clothes daily, the interrelationship between garment style and fabric

qualities is not self-evident to people when they first begin trying to make their own clothes. Choosing the ‘right’ fabric is critical to the look of a garment and also to its form and function as an item of clothing. Current UK fashion culture does little to make the significance of fabric qualities visible to those without professional design training. The decline in home sewing, UK clothing manufacture and the teaching of sewing in schools means that many of those starting to sew their own clothes in the UK today have little or no experience of fabrics as workable materials or of others using fabric to sew clothes. Even those in this study who were exposed to some clothes or costume making within the home while growing up had taken little interest in sewing at that time and consequently had very limited fabric knowledge. The clothes in our wardrobes also offer few clues to the differing qualities of different fabric types. The labels in our clothes tell us only about fibre content, not fabric type, and an increasingly high proportion of clothing is now made from a single fibre type – polyester.

As we saw in Part I, pattern instructions provide suggestions for the fabric to be used for a particular make but reveal little to the beginner about the reasons for these recommendations. Although the qualities of the fabric used to make a garment are integral to its look and feel, these qualities are hard to convey either in words or in images. Information about fibre content (e.g. cotton, viscose, polyester) and the names of fabrics (e.g. calico, canvas, corduroy) can mean little to those unfamiliar with handling fabrics except as wearers of clothes. Even if a type of fabric is familiar, like corduroy, the implications of using it to make an item of clothing are not immediately apparent to someone unfamiliar with clothes-sewing practices. Even those with textile training, such as Phase I interviewee Thandi, may not appreciate the significance of fabric structure (e.g. grainline) to the making of clothes.

Yes, it's just really silly things like understanding that you have to cut something on the grain, or it might actually grow while you are sewing it. Like what!
[laughs] – how's that even a thing?! *Thandi (I)*

The qualities and affordances of fabrics – how fabrics feel, what they will and will not do, how they hang on and off grain, how they will or will not move or ‘give’ – dictate how garments will look and feel on the body and so whether the maker-wearer will deem them to be wearable. As we have seen, online sewing communities and sewalong-style videos on social media are valuable sources of additional information for beginners wanting to choose fabric. Those who engage with this kind of content, including Wendy and Jenny, can glean useful information about the precise fabric others have used for a particular make and where the fabric has been sourced. In this way beginners gain reassurance that the fabric they are using has been tried and tested by others and may afford a wearable result. In the absence of information about what others have used for a particular make, it can be hard for beginners to identify which fabrics will ‘work’ for the item they are trying to make.

The consequential nature of material qualities for the look and feel of clothes starts to become more apparent to beginners through the process of making. Understanding of fabric qualities and their affordances in use is a form of embodied knowledge that can be gained through handling and working with fabric. Wendy and Rasa, who both indicated some awareness of the significance of fabric type to the making of clothes in their introductory workshops, started to reflect on the qualities and affordances of the fabrics they used as the study progressed. Wendy had enjoyed the stability of the cotton used for her Cuff Top after the softer, more loosely woven double-gauze used for her pyjama bottoms. She wondered if the top might take on a different look if she tried remaking it in a thinner fabric or smaller size. Rasa had found the fabric she bought for her first skirt too stiff for the style she had envisaged and was questioning whether the fabric she was planning to make a shirred dress from was thin and pliant enough to achieve the look and feel she wanted. An appreciation of the qualities of fabrics is something that practiced sewists develop a ‘feel’ for in the way that any craftsperson gains an embodied understanding of the substrate they work with, be it wood, clay, glass, or in this case textiles. However, this embodied aspect of sewing knowledge can be elusive, especially when buying fabric online in the absence of touch. In her follow-up interview Wendy spoke about her mum, who made clothes for the family while Wendy was growing up, having a knowledge of fabric accessed

through touch – ‘my mum would just touch something and go, you know, that would be horrible to iron’ (WF). This embodied knowledge – knowing through touch – is an aspect of what Glenn Adamson has termed ‘material intelligence’, which he suggests we are at risk of losing as we increasingly ‘live in a state of general ignorance about our physical surroundings’ (2018: 1).

The experiences of the beginner sewists in this study are a stark contrast with those of the women (aged 55+) involved in the Emotional Fit project, many of whom had ‘lifelong dressmaking skills’ (Townsend & Sadkowska 2020: 22). The preferences these older women expressed in relation to clothing were informed by an appreciation of fabric qualities, often gained through embodied knowledge of making or altering their own garments (Townsend & Sadkowska 2018). These women’s sensory awareness of fabric in relation to the body had informed their clothing choices throughout their lives (ibid.). Negrin writes of the ‘haptic qualities of clothing’ to capture this sense of clothes as experienced by the wearer in relation to the body (2016: 150) and suggests that much Western culture is philosophically ‘predicated on a disavowal of the body’ (2016: 141). Having deepened during the twentieth century, this rejection of the physical body – of the wearer in fashion design – has resulted in less attention being paid to the haptic qualities of clothing than to the appearance of clothing from the position of the outside, or increasingly online, observer. It is these haptic qualities, this tactile sense of clothing – also highlighted by Aldrich (2013) and central to the Emotional Fit project (Townsend & Sadkowska 2018) – that sewing beginners start to tap into and might also develop a ‘feel’ for if they continue to sew.

7.9 The body

The relationship of garment to body is critical to the physiological and psychological wearability of homemade clothes: to the way clothes look and feel on us, the way we feel about them and whether or not we want to wear them. The act of trying to make clothes can draw attention to the specifics of the beginner sewist’s individual body in relation to clothes. In *The Fashioned Body* Joanne Entwistle emphasises that ‘humans are dressed bodies’ (2015: 31) and that dress is ‘situated bodily practice’ (2015: 77). Yet, as McQuillan and Rissanen observe, ‘in much of contemporary fashion, the body is

subservient to industry', considered primarily as producer (maker) or consumer (purchaser) of clothes, while being paid scant regard as wearers during the design and production of ready-to-wear clothing (2020: 150). Bodies that are 'atypical' – that is those not conforming to standardised proportions or fitting a predominantly youthful ideal – are given less consideration still (Townsend et al. 2017, Townsend & Sadkowska 2018). As we have seen, the opportunity for better-fitting clothes is one of the reasons that people are drawn to home sewing but is also one of the more challenging aspects of learning the craft. The individual body is central to the experience of sewing clothes for oneself. The further a sewist's bodily proportions stray from a standardised norm, the more complex the task of making clothes that fit the maker-wearer's physiological and psychological requirements.

As we saw in Part I, the fact that home sewing patterns use standardised systems of sizing, much like shop-bought clothes, can be an unwelcome revelation for beginner sewists looking to resolve their fit issues by making their own clothes. Many of the skills required to achieve a good fit are those of pattern cutting rather than 'sewing', per se. People attracted to home sewing for the better fit it might offer them may be easily put off by their early experiences of sewing, especially when they realise the need to go beyond the template in the pattern envelope to achieve the fit they want.

I think one of the things that surprised me was like how ... and it wasn't something I'd really thought about, but just how convoluted it is to like, take a pattern and make it fit an actual human person. *Jenny* (4)

The skill involved in fitting clothes to the body is not necessarily apparent to those enticed to sew by seeing others do so. When I asked Jenny about this she mentioned a couple of things that had given her the impression that sewing clothes might be easier than it turned out to be for her. The first was *Sewing Bee* and the second was her cousin who sewed:

I've got a cousin who does a lot of sewing and I guess yeah, I guess it's one of those things where like you don't necessarily see all the work that goes into it. You just see the lovely finished product at the end. *Jenny (4)*

Indie pattern brands have started to introduce greater size inclusivity into paper pattern design, extending size ranges beyond the standard offer in ready-to-wear clothing. The Tilly and the Buttons website, for example, highlights that the brand has enlisted the help of 'an expert pattern cutter and grader' to draft some of their styles 'with fuller figures in mind', extending parts of their pattern collection up to a UK size 34. This broader range of sizes is a positive step toward making home sewing more accessible and inclusive, at least for those whose style preferences are met by size-inclusive pattern ranges. Patterns properly drafted to accommodate larger sizes reduce the need for pattern alteration skills amongst beginners and increase the chances of the resulting garments being wearable. They do not, however, eradicate the need for pattern adaptation where, for example, chest, waist and hip measurements place the sewist across size brackets rather than needing a larger size overall.

Those needing to make alterations for fit and prepared to persevere beyond the 'additional barrier' (JF) presented by pattern alteration can access a variety of information online, provided either as an adjunct to branded pattern instructions or via other social media sources. The fact that fit is such a common issue for home sewists means that bodies, and the particularities of different body shapes and sizes, are topics openly discussed in online sewing spaces. Following other people online and 'bombarding' herself with positive images of the kind of thing she might one day be able to make was proving helpful to Jenny, particularly in terms of body positivity.

And, you know, people ... following people of all different body shapes and things like that, so I'm not getting too hung up on my weight and what's happening with that, and, you know, all that kind of thing. So really helps. *Jenny (2)*

[the online sewing world is] just much more inclusive. And, you know, it's ... the fact that I would be sewing it means that I'm looking at it and even if it's on a completely different body shape, I'm thinking, well ... you know, when you're looking at readymade clothes, even if it was on a plus size model, I'd still be looking at them going, oh yeah, but it wouldn't look right on me because of this, or this. Whereas when it's something that I'd potentially be sewing, I know that with trial and error I can probably make it look right. And so it's so much more exciting. So it's not like falling in love with something and then being disappointed because it doesn't fit on the boobs, or you know, it's too baggy on the waist [...] It's looking at something and going, oh, yeah, actually, I could make that at some point in the future and it'd look really good. *Jenny (2)*

Over the course of the project Jenny had realised that for her, learning to sew clothes was a more involved process than she had thought, or than it would have been if she had been able to make the kind of clothes she wanted direct from sewing patterns as presented. However, the visibility of diverse bodies in the largely positive spaces created by various online sewing communities placed the possibility of better fitting clothes seemingly within Jenny's reach.

In contrast to the brands and online communities that cater for and make visible diverse bodies, the DIY Cut & Sew videos that Rasa was drawn to (as we saw in Chapter 6) appeared to take little account of differing body shapes, as simple formulas are presented for the cutting of fabric pieces. The people delivering the instructions in these videos may be relative amateurs themselves. Their enthusiasm to share what they have made adds to the sense of creative inclusivity and possibility around the making of clothes, that had attracted Rasa to sewing in the first place. However, the creators of this kind of content may have little sewing knowledge beyond having made a version of the item they are demonstrating as being wearable on their own body. In the case of Rasa's wrap top, this led to disappointment with the garment's overall look, sufficient to stop her proceeding with it before it was finished (Appendix 16b).

I guess all that I'll learn from these new experiences over the past few months is that following internet tutorials, for me, from people that look quite different from me, even though it looks like it could accommodate is not the most smart idea. *Rasa (2)*

Despite their struggles with fit, both Jenny and Rasa remained interested in learning to make their own clothes. Both women had made wearable lower body garments during the project but were learning to sew in part because of their issues with upper body fit in clothing generally, so this aspect of making remained important to them. In her Follow-up Interview Jenny said she had 'kind of given up a little bit' on trying to learn to sew at home alone and instead was planning to 'invest in doing some classes' (JF). Rasa had shelved her attempts at pattern alteration for the time being and was embarking on what she referred to as the 'reckless' path of working from an online tutorial to make a Shirred dress¹⁷ in the hope that the stretch would circumvent some of her fit issues (RF).

Despite increased attention to size inclusivity in the drafting of contemporary patterns, the fit issues and fitting skills involved in catering for diverse body shapes are not immediately evident to beginner sewists, whether or not they use sewing patterns. All but the most determined beginners may be put off pursuing home sewing beyond their first attempts, once they become aware of the work involved in achieving a fit they are happy with. Martindale's (2017) study suggests that pattern alterations for fit are a frequent topic for online discussion and ongoing learning for those who do continue to sew. The experiences of Jenny and Rasa reflect the extent to which sewing and the skills involved in successfully realising wearable garments are under-recognised and under-valued, even within a contemporary culture that appears to celebrate sewing as a craft.

¹⁷ Made of fabric gathered in repeated horizontal rows using elastic thread so that the bodice fits flexibly to the form of the upper body.

7.10 The relative aesthetics of home-sewn clothes

Having discussed the contemporary sewing context and resources relating to fashion, fabric and fit, I now want to focus on context for the three wearability factors that relate specifically to the physical construction of clothes. As we saw in Part I, when first making garments, beginner sewists encounter many different processes and techniques that are unfamiliar, with consequences for the form, functionality and finish of the items they make. The skill and precision with which these processes and techniques are carried out impacts maker-wearers' assessments of wearability – which are complex, subjective and context specific (Twigger Holroyd 2017, Woodward 2007). People who make their own clothes may want people to know an item of clothing is homemade but they do not want them to know for the wrong reasons. As one of Twigger Holroyd's interviewees recounts, early on in her making experience she wondered if the clothes she made 'looked a bit too homemade' (2017: 96). Beginners are often excited by the idea of being able to say 'I made it' when someone else comments on something they are wearing. Many interviewees and participants in this study talked positively about the prospect of this happening. However, if uncertainties linger about the look or finish of an item – if it might 'look a bit too homemade' – then a compliment might be received with more conflicting feelings.

did I tell you that I wore the lemon dress out the other week and someone was like 'I really like your dress' and she was gone. But then I said to Mum, I said, I just don't think I've got the confidence to go 'I made it' you know ... But that is a really nice, you know, nice to be in something you've done. And I think that's what's driving me more. *Steph (3)*

One strategy for mitigating anxieties of the kind described above is to focus making activities around items that most lend themselves to being homemade. One of Twigger Holroyd's knitters describes taking this approach in her knitting practice by concentrating on colourwork and Arans, the histories of which are closely tied to domestic rather than mass production (2017: 101). In contrast, in contemporary home-sewing culture – particularly as represented by indie pattern brands, on Instagram and YouTube – items such as jeans, underwear and swimwear feature

prominently amongst the garments that are made and promoted to amateur sewists. The encouragement to make these garment types is reflected in Martindale & McKinney's (2018) finding that jeans, outerwear and underwear were all items that the sewists in their study were looking to add to their sewing repertoires.¹⁸ However, as Twigger Holroyd points out, jeans owe their aesthetics to industrial rather than home production (2017: 96). Attempting to make jeans within the home demonstrates an admirable 'can do' spirit amongst home sewists and those creating patterns and online resources for the home sewing community. It also belies the fact that to make jeans in a domestic setting, with a domestic (rather than industrial) sewing machine, requires a considerable amount of skill. For the resulting jeans to be considered wearable in the sense that they might pass as 'real' jeans (Rosie Martin in Twigger Holroyd 2017: 95) – that is, shop-bought – would demand a strong needle, a well-powered machine and a great deal of precision. Making jeans was beyond the ambition of any of the Phase II participants at the time of the research. However, Phase I interviewee Hope was considering trying to make jeans as she sought to improve the sustainability of her sewing practice by making the kind of items she wore most regularly – rather than the novelty-print items she had made when she first started sewing.

As we saw in Part I, one of the complicating factors encountered by beginners when first making clothes is the need to navigate the difference between construction processes as commonly instructed – with the use of an overlocker – and as encountered with the tools most beginners have available to them. While beginners are guided to use the zigzag stitch on their domestic sewing machines as an alternative to overlocking, the difference between these two ways of finishing a raw fabric edge and even the purpose of finishing edges at all can go unexplained. The illustrated pattern instructions (particularly those for indie patterns) show an overlocked finish that is familiar from the inside of shop-bought clothes. In comparison, the unfamiliar zigzagged edge may be considered less neat or 'professional'. By edge finishing and

¹⁸ As Identified in Chapter 3, Martindale and McKinney's (2018) work, which has a consumer focus, involved sewists who were more experienced than the participants in this study. Many of the women interviewed for that study aspired to make more, if not all, of their clothes.

trimming fabric concurrently, overlockers quickly neaten raw edges and are particularly useful in sewing stretch fabrics. On the downside, overlockers can be difficult and time consuming to thread, can make accidental cuts in fabric if inexpertly handled and more than double the set-up cost for the home sewist. For these reasons most beginners, including the Phase II participants in this study, start sewing without having access to one.

The prevalence of overlockers in the visual and material culture of contemporary home sewing may impact the expectations people have of homemade clothes and their assessments of the wearability of the items they make. Wendy, who had struggled to zigzag finish the seam allowance on her first garment, mentioned in her third ViEW encounter that she had been reassured when we had spoken about the fact that her zigzag finished edges *would* look different to the overlocked edges shown in the instructions. For some beginners, the wearability of their homemade garments may hinge on the ‘neatness’ of finish that the overlocker provides. Some of the more experienced beginners interviewed in Phase I had purchased overlockers after their first attempts at sewing. Alison, who had some prior experience of sewing as a teenager, said she convinced herself she needed an overlocker before returning to sewing as an adult for this reason. Elly’s mum had bought her an overlocker after the unravelling linen skirt incident relayed earlier (Section 7.4). Thandi saw purchasing an overlocker after making only a few items as a sign of her ongoing commitment to learning to sew clothes.

In her third ViEW encounter, Sophie talked about the neatness and positioning of the zigzagged edges on the cuffs of her ‘Stevie’ dress and whether these might be visible. I was surprised to find later in the same ViEW encounter that, following the pattern instructions, Sophie had also zigzagged the bottom hem of the dress and turned it only once. An overlocked and single turned hem would be common on a shop-bought garment, but for a home sewist without an overlocker, a thin summer garment could be more neatly finished by turning a narrow hem twice, with no need for edge finishing at all and no visible zigzagged raw edge (Figure 29). For someone like Sophie, for whom neatness was strongly linked to wearability, a zigzagged edge visible at the

cuff or the hem of a dress could result in an item quickly falling out of favour. This was not immediately the case for Sophie's 'Stevie' dress, with which she was delighted. But were Sophie to continue sewing beyond this first completed non-test garment, finishing details of this kind may come to be scrutinised more harshly. While an overlocker may be assumed to be the only solution, there are other ways to finish a hem that offer a just as neat, if not neater, finish using the sewing machines that beginner sewists already have to hand. These methods may be slightly more complex to relay in pattern instructions but in practice need take no more time. Similarly, there are many different ways to finish the raw edges of fabric on the inside of home-sewn clothes (Figure 30) which are useful for different kinds of garment, fabric types and weight. By providing a more universal solution, the overlocker requires less engagement with these material differences. The more the overlocked finish becomes the norm for home sewists, as well as in industrially produced clothing, the more the overlocker comes to be considered essential and the less the aesthetics of homemade clothes may be seen as acceptable or neat enough to be wearable. Thus, the pull to mimic the aesthetics of mass-produced clothing is strengthened.

This discussion illustrates some of the tensions that home sewists must navigate if they want to make clothes they will wear. The items they make may be held up, by them or by others, to the standards of industrially produced clothing and in that comparison fare badly for their 'homemade "Look"' (Twigger Holroyd 2017: 94). On the other hand, beginners with little or no access to hands-on mentoring or support may find it difficult, with the online resources available to them, to discern what is achievable at their current level of skill or to resolve issues they encounter along the way. Making these judgements about what to make and how to achieve a finish that they, as the maker-wearer, feel is 'good enough' to be wearable can be difficult in an environment encouraging remote learning and designed to make home clothes sewing attractive to amateurs.



Figure 29 - Four hems: (a) Overlocked finish, (b) Zigzagged finish, (c) Twice turned, (d) Hand hemmed.

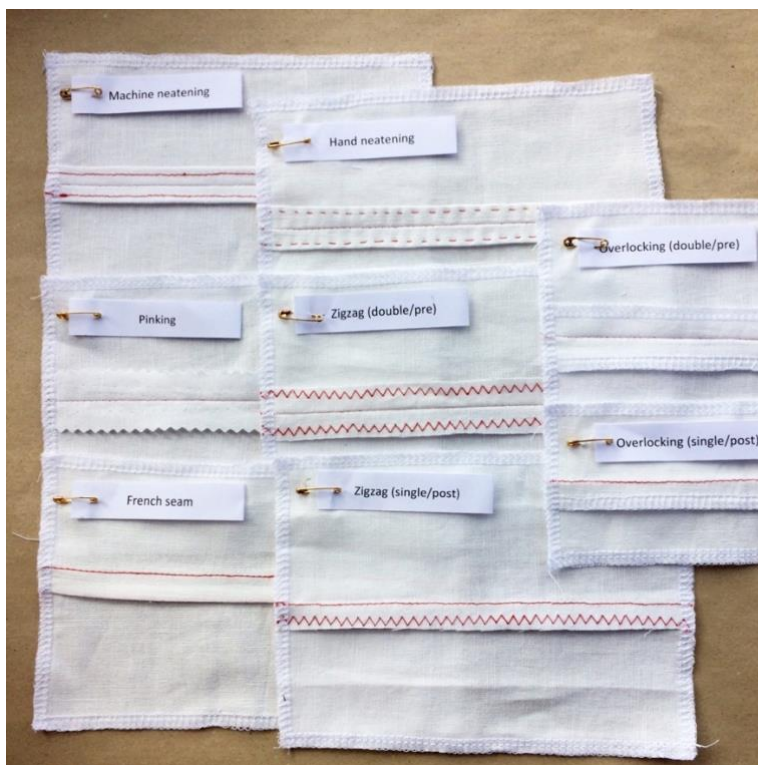


Figure 30 - Samples showing different techniques for seam finishing

7.11 Conclusion

In Chapter 6, I identified positive affect associated with the making of wearable clothes. In this chapter I have approached the wearability of clothes made by beginner sewists from different perspectives. I have identified six factors – fashion, fabric, fit, form, functionality and finish – that impact on assessments of the physical and aesthetic wearability of the clothes that beginners make. And, taking a broader view of wearability, I have considered how aspects of the cultural context within which clothes sewing is encountered by beginners might impact the physiological and psychological wearability of self-sewn clothes.

Clothes making is an example of a craft practice where the outcomes of the craft activity *do* appear to be important to the maker (Twigger Holroyd 2014, 2016). This research finds that the wearability of home-sewn clothes was important to those who made them not least because of a desire not to waste time, money or materials. This desire to avoid waste links motivations for sewing to the sustainability concerns found to be common amongst interviewees and participants in this study. From the perspective of material use, it is the clothes which are enduringly worn that are the most sustainable (Fletcher 2016). Home sewn clothes, like any other clothes, are only sustainable in this material sense if they are worn and, in being worn, substitute shop-bought clothes and reduce, rather than increase, material consumption overall.

As we have seen, making *wearable* clothes requires a combination of ‘makerly’ and ‘designerly’ skills that are not necessarily apparent to people until they start trying to make clothes for themselves. Makerly skills include the more evident technical skills linked to clothing construction and the form, functionality and finish of home-sewn clothes. Designerly skills, which are seemingly less obvious to sewing beginners, include material awareness and interrelationships between fashion, fabric and fit and some understanding of how clothes work in relation to the body. The experiences of beginners in this study highlight the centrality of the body to both these spheres of skill – both to how clothes are made and how they work on the body. The material entanglement of body and garment has been explored elsewhere from different

perspectives – in relation to clothing design and construction (Aldrich 2013), physiological and psychological fit (Townsend & Sadkowska 2020) and everyday experiences of selecting and wearing primarily shop-bought clothes (Woodward 2007) – variously emphasising the qualities and affordances of fabric and the sensory nature of clothing. The wearability 6Fs identified in this chapter, based on maker-wearers’ experiences of learning to sew, cluster around the two spheres of makerly and designerly skill, making the centrality of the body to experiences of home sewing more apparent.

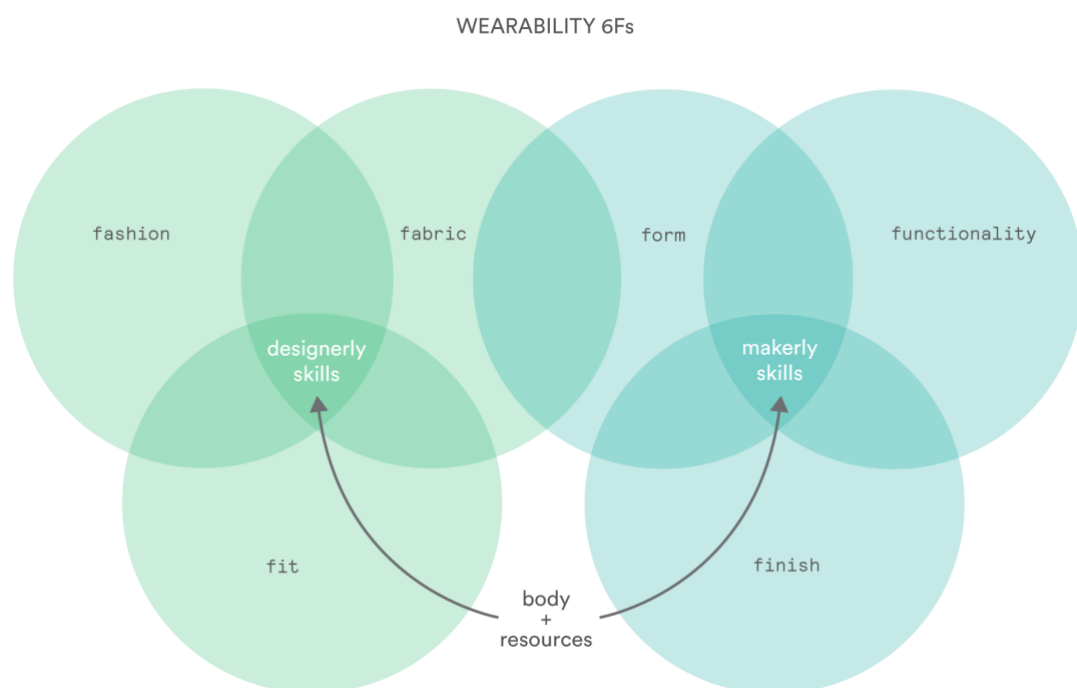


Figure 31- Wearability '6Fs' cluster diagram

The experiences of Phase I and Phase II participants highlighted how quickly beginners identify changes they want or need to make to the sewing patterns they follow, especially (but not exclusively) where their bodies do not conform to standardised proportions. The desire to adapt for physiological or psychological fit points to the importance of designerly skills – those of pattern cutting and alteration rather than sewing per se – where pattern brands and other online resources depend on a wider community of home sewists to complete the picture and support one another to make

clothes that fit. The significance of our divergent bodies to experiences of making as well as wearing clothes can be obscured by the material and online culture surrounding home sewing, much as is the case in fashion more generally (McQuillan & Rissanen 2020). This matters because the wearability of home-sewn clothes is linked not just to their material sustainability but also to the positive affect that inspires ongoing sewing practice and the reinforcing positive affect derived from acquiring new craft skills.

In Chapter 8 I will address the theme of materiality, extending beyond the physical body and affordances of fabric addressed above to include the materialities of everyday life that provide the context for home sewing.

CHAPTER 8 – MATERIALITY

The video clips that Rasa, Steph, Wendy, Jenny and Sophie recorded provided a proxy for direct in-person engagement and the multi-sensory, 3D view of their sewing practices that synchronous in-person workshop activities would have allowed. As these clips were discussed during ViEW encounters, the participants shared their sewing experiences with me. In Chapter 6 I focused on the affective dimension of these sewing experiences, both positive and negative. In Chapter 7, I focused on the wearability of homemade clothes (linked to positive affect). Based on the participants' assessments of the garments they made and the techniques and processes they encountered in the patterns and online tutorials they followed, I highlighted six factors that impact the wearability of self-sewn clothes. In this chapter I will focus on the materiality of these learning experiences. In doing so I take inspiration from Sophie Woodward's definition of a material-orientated ontology found in her book *Material Methods: researching and thinking with things* (2020):

Broadly defined, a material-oriented ontology is one which positions things and materials as an integral and entangled part of social relations and worlds. People, relations and things are all co-constituted as things play an active role in the uses and meanings they come to have.

A material-oriented ontology is one which does not prioritise people or the 'social' or 'cultural', but instead sees social relations as being simultaneously social and material and things as playing an active role in the materialisation of personhood and culture. (Woodward 2020: 25).

This definition is consistent with the ideas of new materialism (introduced in Section 2.2) in its 'refusal of dualisms' such as subject/object, nature/culture and mind/body (Coole 2013: 454) and its ontology of 'becoming' rather than being (Coole 2013:253). Coole's new materialism and Woodward's material methods provide encouragement to look closely at processes of materialisation and to contextualise them with an understanding of the social and the material as entwined. This approach may help in

understanding issues of fashion and sustainability, where consumption and production, the cultural and the material, are too often treated as distinct (McRobbie 1997, Entwistle 2015, Woodward 2007). Woodward and Fisher attempt to bring the two together by focusing on ‘fashioning’ as a process of materialisation that encompasses not just of the production and consumption of fashion items but the ‘networks of people and garments that produce the meanings of fashion’ (2014: 8). In this fashioning the material and immaterial are reciprocally entwined with one another and with the material relations and contexts that give rise to each.

In this study of the materialisation of garments in the hands of amateurs, we have seen the material and the immaterial entwined, as maker-wearers assess the wearability of what they have made. I have already touched on the significance of materiality – of the body and the affordances of fabric – to the wearability of self-sewn garments (Sections 7.8 and 7.9). In this chapter I will focus on what happens when human bodies coincide with physical tools and materials and the materialities of everyday life (space, time and money) to consider how these materialities shape beginners’ experiences of sewing.

8.1 Embodied material practices

In this section I will focus on the physical materiality of beginners’ sewing experiences. In doing so, I will reflect on what happens when inspiration, information and instruction, often gleaned online, are brought to life as embodied material practice.

Both Jenny and Rasa commented on how surprisingly physical they had found their first experiences of sewing; this physicality was also reflected in the video clips shared by other participants, in which fabric cutting was often taking place on the floor (Figure 32).

and, like, cutting and how fiddly it all was, and how I didn't realise how ... like how I would think it could be more precise but then when I'm actually physically doing the task how weirdly it's a lot more demanding than you think it would be. I was like if I wasn't like able-bodied I don't know how a person

could do that because you either need a really really big table or need a hardwood floor which I ended up switching to so then the video you'll see I'm actually on a hardwood floor. *Rasa (1)*

So as you can see, I keep like changing my physical positioning because I found it quite difficult sitting on the ground, but I didn't have a big elevated space to do this on. So yeah, it's lots of fiddling and me trying to let the camera see, as you can see. *Rasa (1)*



Figure 32 - Cutting out fabric on the floor: (a) Rasa cutting fabric for New Look skirt during the First Making Period; (b) Wendy cutting fabric for pyjama trousers during First Making Period.

In addition to the physical awkwardness of working on the floor, part of Rasa's struggle with both cutting and pinning was her temptation to lift the fabric to handle it, which meant gravity pulled pattern, fabric and scissors out of alignment.

I'm like pinning into the ground because I was like I didn't want to raise it up to them holding in my hands and then something slips and becomes mangled and awkward. And I kept like ... see there we go, there we go. I keep like raising up and then everything goes wobbly and scribbly. And yeah cos I was trying to make myself physically I think more comfortable, then realise this doesn't really blend well with tissue paper lying snug against the fabric itself. *Rasa (1)*

So I found that you want ... when you, as a kid, learn how to cut anything you usually twist the piece with you. With fabric, it didn't really ... I wanted to but then it didn't really make that much sense. So I found that I need to physically move myself around it itself rather than move it for me. *Rasa (1)*

Through trial and error, over the period of the research project, the participants adjusted their practices and devised new ways of working in response to their embodied experiences of working with unwieldy materials in often awkward spaces.

Sewing 'in real life'

Rasa was the youngest of the five Phase II participants. Her early comment about being part of the 'YouTube generation' referred to the experience of growing up frequently seeing people instructing other people on video (R1). Rasa had picked up a great deal of sewing language and tips from the online content she had viewed. When I said she appeared already to have understood an enormous amount she said 'I think it just looks that way. But also, I do just watch people sew a LOT. Like that's what I do to tune out' (R2). She then likened herself to a meme of the Demon Cat character from the Adventure Time cartoon who has 'approximate knowledge of many things' (R2). I noticed when coding Rasa's ViEW encounters how frequently she would refer to what 'people' say, talk about, are aware of, make, show or tend to do, but also how context-free and disembodied these multiple voices seemed to be.

Rasa reflected on how the experiences she brought to sewing, of cutting with scissors as a child, had not proved very helpful to her when first trying to cut fabric. She sometimes seemed surprised by the challenge of putting what she had seen online into practice. Echoing the knowing irony of the YouTubers (Micarah Tewers and Rachel Maksy) in the Performative videos she enjoyed watching, Rasa seemed to embrace the absurdity, or what she at one point described as ‘physical comedy’ (R1), of some of her sewing experiences. However, she also wanted to be able to make garments she would wear, and to be more confident in her sewing skills, hence her interest in the Vintage Inspired tips and advice of YouTubers such as Evelyn Wood. Rasa identified a need for somebody to ask questions of and to gain access to ‘that sort of realm of knowledge from before’ (R2). Like most of the other participants and interviewees in this study, Rasa had no in-person or regular contact with anyone else who sewed (except remotely, during the project, in ViEW encounters with me).

Rasa’s experience highlights again the limitations of video as a medium for learning a craft for which one has limited embodied or material knowledge to draw on for reference. In Sections 6.5 and 6.4 we already saw some of the challenges that video presents: the challenge of relaying the process of garment construction at full scale in three-dimensional space via the video camera and laptop screen; and, as a beginner, the challenge of ‘seeing what you need to see’. In Rasa’s example above, we return to the third challenge introduced in Section 6.5, of recognising what is not shown when practices are relayed via decontextualised online spaces. The time, space and resources required to participate in sewing activities are often downplayed, if not entirely unspoken. The voices of those delivering the information, even when doing so in a confessional ‘share all’ tone, are often disembodied, in the sense of who they are, how they know what they know or how their unique body informs that knowing, their knowledge of clothes or of clothes making. Through their engagement with the embodied practice of trying to make clothes, beginner sewists choosing to learn to sew at home alone may soon encounter these absences – of material context and of bodies – even if not explicitly recognised as such. Those undeterred and determined enough to continue sewing will likely seek out ‘real people’ with whom they can connect more

personally via online sewing communities if not out in the real world. But others may easily become disillusioned or feel excluded from the start.

8.2 Material engagement

Unwieldy tools and materials

Like Rasa, Jenny remarked on how surprisingly physical she had found her first experiences of sewing. Jenny had initially decided to trim her paper pattern pieces outside the cut line in the hope that cutting through this line at the same time as the fabric might result in more accurately cut pieces of fabric. When this proved difficult Jenny wondered whether her scissors were becoming blunt but also reflected on how physical she had found standing over the fabric and preparing to cut it.

I had read that, you know, cutting through paper can blunt your scissors and it did feel like they just did start to stop working [laughs], which was a bit annoying. So yeah, so I was really struggling and I think as well one of the things I've realised is that you're using lots of different muscles when you're doing this. So I was, like I spent a lot of time stood up and then obviously using the scissors and cutting through two things of material and then the paper was quite tough. So I don't know if I was just getting a bit like tired at that point as well, even though I'd only been cutting for, like, two and a half minutes [laughs]. *Jenny (1)*

Later in the project, to overcome the difficulties she had encountered when cutting fabric, Jenny, like many contemporary sewists, switched from using pins and scissors to using a rotary cutter and pattern weights, which she found much easier (Figure 33). Rotary cutters and pattern weights can assist those with little experience of handling fabric to cut the pieces they need for the garments they want to make.



Figure 33 - Jenny cutting fabric (a) using scissors during First Making Period (b) using rotary cutter during Second Making Period.

In contrast to Jenny, Rasa quickly started to develop a sense of how to work with the scissors and fabric. When I asked her about what she was doing with her left hand while cutting (Figure 34) Rasa spoke about what she was doing in relation to fabric tension and gravity:

Ah, yeah, I'm trying to keep the tension. That sort of made sense to me because then I could let the fabric fall over the scissors themselves. And they,

you know, because I guess of gravity, they will just fall more or less evenly. So that was ... yeah, that was something I used. *Rasa* (1)



Figure 34 - Rasa cutting fabric for New Look skirt during First Making Period.

I did not ask Rasa at the time whether this was something she had worked out for herself or if it was a tip she had picked up from one of the more technique-focused Vintage Inspired videos I later learnt she watched. Gently lifting fabric, and holding light tension in it, while letting it fall evenly over the scissors sounds like just the kind of ‘bridge’ (Wood 2006), discussed in Section 3.2, that an experienced sewist might offer a novice to support them in developing their own embodied knowledge of this common sewing practice.

Another factor in Rasa and Jenny’s contrasting experiences of cutting fabric was the materials each was using. Rasa had drawn around her commercial tissue paper pattern, to make it easier to cut her fabric. Jenny was working from an indie pattern printed at home and traced onto greaseproof paper. In Section 5.3, I wrote about indie and commercial patterns mostly with reference to the style of instruction and the associated online resources. However, the other important difference between the

two is in the material qualities of the paper on which they are printed – commercial patterns traditionally being printed on lightweight tissue paper and indie patterns either pre-printed on a thicker paper or home printed on standard weight (usually 80gsm) printer paper.

Viewed as active things (Woodward 2020) in the process of making clothes, tissue paper patterns might be described as being empathetic to the fabric, mirroring its behaviour and not inhibiting it. By contrast the stiffer paper of the home-printed PDF pattern is less well matched to the fluidity of fabric and less easily secured with pins. Pins, if used, are less effective in holding pattern and fabric in direct correspondence. In their materiality, the new generation of printed and PDF indie patterns – like the greaseproof paper Jenny is using in Figure 33 above – tend to preference the use of rotary cutters and pattern weights in place of pins and scissors. Rather than being joined with the fabric, these stiffer paper patterns are imposed from above and can be laid down and cut round without direct engagement with the fabric itself. Working in this way, the maker engages less with the feel, the weight and the handle of the fabric. Like the overlockers discussed in Section 7.10, the rotary cutters and pattern weights that work well with sturdier paper patterns require less direct fabric handling than the pins and scissors they partially replace. By requiring less fabric handling, cutting fabric in this way is also less instructive of how fabric moves and behaves – or handles – and so, also less generative of that aspect of embodied knowing which is a valuable aspect of sewing skill (or competence). These contemporary sewing tools (rotary cutter and pattern weights) are also less versatile than the tools traditionally used in cutting pattern pieces from fabric and elsewhere in the clothes making process.

As noted in Section 5.3, in addition to the visual appeal of indie patterns and their instructions, another reason often stated for this preference is that the tissue paper on which commercial patterns is considered to be more ‘fiddly’ to handle and the paper itself less robust. Yet tissue paper patterns, in their mirroring of fabric qualities, have another purpose in the process of fitting the pattern to the individual body. Joy Spanabel Emery suggests that the origin of the tissue paper pattern might be traced back to the days before printed patterns, when the ‘how to’ guides of the late

eighteenth century offered home dressmakers three options for cutting a well-fitting garment: ‘drafting garments using set instructions, picking apart a favourite garment ... or fitting thin paper over the body’ (1999: 235).

The fitting of garment patterns to the body, as we saw in Section 7.9, is often downplayed and so under-recognised in contemporary sewing culture as first encountered by beginners. The material qualities of the stiffer paper on which indie patterns are printed, and especially those of patterns pieced at home from A4 pages, do not lend themselves well to the fitting task, for those who continue sewing long enough to realise the need. If not traced onto thinner paper, stiff paper patterns work better as templates to cut round than as guides to fit to the body. For the beginners in this study the tracing of patterns was mostly seen as an additional and time consuming chore. The dislike of tissue paper patterns, expressed by Phase I interviewees and frequently encountered online, feels like another way in which the body is downplayed in the material culture of contemporary home sewing and mirrors, in some way, the absence of the body noted by scholars (Negrin 2016, Townsend et al. 2017, Townsend & Sadkowska 2018, McQuillan & Rissanen 2020) in fashion more generally.

Intransigent machines

Sewing machines were not mentioned a great deal in the Phase I interviews, except by Hope and Krish who had both had some difficulties with the older models they were using. During Phase II, the active role each sewing machine played in the participants’ differing experiences of sewing was highlighted. Like Hope and Krish, Rasa was working on an older secondhand machine. Steph, Wendy and Jenny all had new machines of various models and Sophie borrowed a Bernette b35 from the project. Although all the participants were able to use their sewing machines effectively following their Introductory Workshop, all experienced some challenges in doing so early on. Based on video instruction, both Rasa and Wendy had misunderstood the step of drawing up the bobbin thread when first setting up the machine, assuming it to be something that would need doing each time they started to sew. This had led to some false starts and tangled threads.

So it wasn't the bird's nest that people talk about, where everything goes jumble jumble, it was specifically the top thread getting caught in the ... the metal plate, essentially [...] So every time before I did a stitch, I thought I needed to pull the top thread inside the bobbin half way almost. You know when you lower it [the needle] and then you see it [the bobbin case] roll around halfway. I thought that has to happen every time which now with reflection, I think just probably makes another tangle in there. [...] literally this weekend, I realised no one else does that. And because I would watch people with modern machines and I thought it was just with the modern machine, maybe you don't need to do it. *Rasa* (1)

Jenny also experienced some initial problems with her machine jamming, until she realised that she had not been leaving long enough threads to start a seam with and had not been holding on to them when first lowering the needle to start sewing. As a result of these difficulties Jenny, Wendy and Rasa had gained a lot of experience of threading and rethreading their machines, which Jenny and Wendy both suggested had been helpful later on when their bobbin and top threads ran out.

Jenny and Rasa both noted that when encountering difficulties with a sewing machine as a beginner, you don't know 'if it is you or the machine' (J1) or, as Rasa put it, 'whether it's actually a me issue or a machine issue' (R1). In trying to troubleshoot the problems they were having with their machines using online resources, Jenny and Rasa both investigated many possible causes, taking parts of the bobbin mechanism out in Jenny's case and unscrewing the plate, cleaning inside and experimenting with different machine needles in Rasa's. These troubleshooting activities themselves risked creating further problems, especially for Rasa who did not own a manual for her vintage machine and could not find one online.

Because I found a similar manual, but it still had different bits and bobs. And yeah, just the sheer ... not being able to know that what you're troubleshooting is actually the right thing to do ... Because I remember spending like two or three hours just like try this, and try that, and try the other one and the other

thing. And once I fixed one thing or that now this one thing is not working, because I'm actually still making some of the mistakes at same time. So it's not like the answer is one magical answer. I was making several mistakes ... I feel like, maybe if I was learning in a more formal sense, that was a class or maybe part of a course, I would have some sort of ... you know, there'd be a teacher, I could just check things with. *Rasa* (1)

Another common problem with tangled threads was due to the participant not fully raising the machine needle before removing their sewn fabric. Although I had covered this step in the introductory workshops and the basic guide provided at the start of the project, it was often overlooked by participants. Unlike other machines in common daily use (e.g. kettles, toasters, blenders, washing machines), basic sewing machines mostly do not stop and start at the beginning and end of a (stitch) cycle in an on/off fashion; they require more interaction to position the thread, the fabric and the machine mechanism correctly to start a seam or remove the stitched fabric from the machine. Without understanding how the machine functions, this positioning process does not seem obvious or intuitive to beginner sewists and so is easily forgotten.

As well as knowledge of how the sewing machine should work, machine sewing requires physical control, both of the foot pedal for speed and the positioning of the fabric by hand. Machine sewing requires hand-eye co-ordination, similar in many ways to driving a car. In practice machine sewing is perhaps better understood as a full-body experience than something simply done with the hands. The experience of learning to operate a sewing machine is therefore personal and context specific. Sophie described the common beginners' challenge of finding the right speed:

I think sometimes it went a little bit too quick for me, but then I was finding it difficult to, yeah, to get the right speed I think with the stitching. It was either going too fast or it wasn't, it had stopped because it was ... I wasn't putting enough pressure on the foot [pedal]. *Sophie* (1)

The older sewing machine that Rasa was working on appeared to run fast with relatively little pressure on the foot pedal. Rasa struggled to find a ‘sweet spot’ that would allow her ‘a stable slower speed’ (R2), which seemed to make it difficult for her to physically intuit how the machine would respond. As a consequence, Rasa initially struggled to gain the control she needed to sew around curves, which requires sewing speed and fabric manipulation to be judged in relation to one another. The Amazon Basics sewing machine that Steph was using at the start of the project lacked a variable speed control altogether. After borrowing a machine from the project for the subsequent Making Periods, Steph realised the difference being able to control the pressure she put on the pedal made, and how the variable speed allowed her to ‘relax a bit more’ (S3). Finding the ‘right’ machine speed when sewing is a matter of judgement, which, like other aspects of sewing, requires the assimilation of embodied knowledge that can only be felt and learnt through practice, like other embodied craft skills (e.g. O’Connor 2005, Wood 2006, Ekström 2012).



Figure 35 - Jenny, sewing her first seam during the First Making Period.

Jenny’s reflection on the video clip of her sewing her first seams (Figure 35) – ‘It almost feels like it’s slow motion, doesn’t it, when you watch it’ (J1) – raises the question of how, particularly when learning remotely, one judges the ‘right’ speed. Jenny was

sewing cautiously, at what appeared to be an appropriate speed for her ability to handle and feed the fabric through the machine. However, as highlighted in Section 6.5, sewing videos used to inform home sewing practices often speed up or skip the parts of the making process where seams are actually sewn. Reflecting on how the sewing of seams to make her pyjama shorts had taken little time despite what she felt was her slow sewing speed, Jenny projected forward to what this might mean for her sewing in future:

I can't get over is how little time it's taken me to actually do this garment once I actually started doing the sewing. So, yeah, and if it feels fast when I'm going really, really slowly, like, in a few months or years I'll be so fast, it'll be amazing. Although I'll make up for it by doing much more complex things hopefully.

Jenny (1)

This quote articulates a relationship between machine use, skill, time and expectations which echoes Schwarz Cowan's observation, highlighted in *More Work for Mother* (1983), that rather than saving us time, domestic technologies raise our expectations of what we might achieve. Although Schwarz Cowan was writing about domestic labour and I am writing here about home sewing primarily as a hobby, the hope that greater competence in the use of tools would lead in future to *more activity* rather than *less time* required is interesting. This orientation to 'more' is prevalent in a digitally mediated home sewing culture in which 'faster' is good and 'more' is seemingly always an option (see Section 8.3, below). As Fletcher observes of items labelled 'slow fashion' without embracing 'slow' in an ontological sense (Fletcher 2010: 262), there is much in contemporary home sewing culture that actually seems faster than ever before.

Active objects

As the examples above illustrate, the specificity of the machine in use can be seen to shape the sewist's experience of how it feels to sew (e.g. tense or relaxed) and what the machine enables (e.g. sewing fast or slow, straight or round curves), and what might be learnt as a consequence (e.g. regarding what type of garments might be

attempted or even whether sewing practice might continue at all). Sewing machines can be understood as ‘active’ (Woodward 2020: 25) in beginners’ experiences of learning to sew. The relationship between sewist and sewing machine is highlighted in Sophie’s quote above, in terms of what ‘it’ and ‘I’ do. When sewing practices are discussed it is common for people talk about what a machine ‘will or will not do’ or what it ‘does or does not like’, as in this quote from Rasa: ‘It’s like it doesn’t want to give you that slow pace’ (R2). After experiencing this and other problems with her machine during the First Making Period, I offered Rasa a new machine (with a manual) like Sophie’s to use during the project. Rasa declined this offer and later reflected that:

I think that it's quite funny that I have this machine that I have to deal with and she's got a character of her own sometimes. But she's not been acting up, so it's fine. And learning ... actually I think learning how the machine functions and how *my* machine functions has been a very interesting experience. *Rasa* (3)

Speaking of machines in relational terms is, in some ways, unsurprising, as machines (like other craft tools) are used as extensions of ourselves, connecting our physical bodies and the materials we handle in the making of clothes we one day hope to wear. Sewing machines can be seen as active in the ‘materialisation of personhood and culture’ (Woodward 2020:25).

Steph, who had started the project referring to her sewing machine as her ‘new best friend’, also intimated a falling out during the First Making Period when she suggested they were ‘friends again’ after she had resorted to hand sewing a patch pocket because the layers of fabric proved too thick for the machine. This example emphasises how it is not just the individual and the machine but also the fabric that is active in the experience of sewing and the outcomes of sewing activities. A different machine would likely have handled the fabric better; a more experienced sewist might have approached the task differently; a thinner fabric might not have caused the problem in the first place. Understood in this way, the sewing of the pocket to the dress is an assemblage activity involving the sewist, the fabric and the sewing machine. The assemblage that makes the sewing of the pocket possible also extends beyond the

materials and material objects at hand, to also include the material context within which the activity takes place. In the next section I will expand on this idea to include some of the materialities of everyday life (space, time and money) that shape beginners' experiences of sewing.

8.3 The materialities of everyday life

Making space

Finding space for sewing within the home was a challenge for most of the participants. As seen above, with table space limited, many cutting and tracing activities were initially carried out on the floor. Unlike the experienced amateur makers that Andrew Jackson (2013) discusses, none of the participants in this study had a dedicated making space. The space these women found for sewing often had to compete with other domestic priorities and other people's requirements of the limited space within the home. Writing about amateur textile craft practices, Marybeth Stalp (2006) highlights time and space for craft practice having to be negotiated in relation to gendered roles within family life. Unlike the quilters in Stalp's study, those involved in Phases I and II of this research had professional working lives outside the home and only a minority had children. Nonetheless, there was still a sense of space for sewing having to be negotiated, including in relation to the space required for paid work which, for many, at the time of the study was also being conducted temporarily from home due to Covid-19.

At one point Jenny spoke excitedly about being able to get on with her sewing because she was going to have the whole office to herself while her husband was away for the weekend. Wendy's sewing activities were competing for space in the living room, where her partner also sometimes wanted to watch TV. Sophie said that leaving the sewing machine set up in the kitchen-diner did not go down well with her partner, who preferred that it was put away. Although Rasa had a table where she could leave her sewing machine set up, she expressed frustration at not having the space she felt she needed to work as neatly as she wanted to. In the First Making Period Rasa had moved around her flat to find somewhere with sufficient space and a hard surface on which to trace patterns and cut fabric.

I have the space to do it, it's just not the most comfortable because you don't feel like you have this much control. I think that's the other thing. But, you know, not all of us can have the tables to make patterns on and obviously that's just a thing. *Rasa* (2)

Wendy was also conscious that her space for cutting out fabric was less than ideal and was having an impact on how accurate she could be:

at the cutting out stage, just thinking I haven't got the right space. I don't know if I'm showing you what I need and it seems to be moving all over the place. So at the end, it was just like, just just get something cut out and I know that they're [the pyjamas] you know forgiving enough to cope with a bit of movement. *Wendy* (1)

Rasa and Wendy both indicated that capturing their cutting activities on video had added to the awkwardness of working on the floor but in the absence of an available table they would have been working this way anyway. Rasa identified a workaround for handling fabric in a limited space, by cutting down the size of the fabric she was using before cutting out the garment pieces: 'if the fabric is bigger than me, then I move around the fabric, but it's not then I'm the boss of the situation' (R1). By the Third Making Period Rasa had moved house and finally had a table space for cutting fabric. Cutting fabric down to size and being able to work on a table made it much easier for Rasa to move around the fabric and was, she felt, helping her to work in a more 'controlled way' (R3) – see Figure 36.

Wendy and Jenny had also tried to find ways to improve their sewing space by moving things around within the home. Jenny and her husband had rearranged their office several times. Wendy was hoping to be able to section off a space where she could leave her sewing out. She mused about what she would have in her ideal sewing room – 'in this house that doesn't exist' (W1) – while also remembering that her mum (who had sewn clothes when Wendy was a child) had also managed to work on a piece of cardboard on the floor.



Figure 36 - Rasa cutting a bodice front from calico in the Third Making Period

Finding, making and taking time

The participants' sewing activities inevitably competed with other priorities for the time they might devote to it. As well as finding space to sew, finding time for sewing was an issue for most. Having limited space also increased the amount of time sewing took, when a space needed to be set up on each occasion. The length of time it takes to sew an item of clothing is obscured in popular sewing culture on TV and online. The amount of time involved in sewing clothes was a surprise to most participants and all aspired to become quicker at it.

you're seeing people [on *Sewing Bee*] creating these amazing things in like 4 hours. Takes me 4 hours just to get everything set up and actually, you know, work out what my pattern size is and everything like that. *Jenny (F)*

Several of the Phase I interviewees had either started sewing or been able to sew more than usual because the Covid-19 pandemic reduced their work commitments and meant more time was available. Rasa, Steph and Wendy had more time as a result of changed work patterns when they were first recruited to the project (February

2021). As their working patterns started to get back to normal (April 2021), finding time to sew became more of a challenge. Steph, who had initially wondered whether she would be able to fit participation in the project around work and family life, remarked that she was enjoying sewing so much that she was still finding time for it despite her other commitments.

I think it surprised me how much I'm loving it [sewing]. That's what's, you know, I, I've got two boys and a busy job. And I'm still finding time to do stuff that I love, which is ... you know, you should always do that anyway in life.

Steph (1)

Two of the Phase I interviewees (Adam and Alison), who both had family responsibilities and busy jobs, similarly spoke about finding slots of time for sewing after work or at weekends. Although sewists might prefer to have dedicated time for sewing, the time people found for it was often in 'chunks of hours here and there after work' (So2). Jenny, who was particularly keen to have more dedicated time for sewing, had been planning for some months to reduce her work hours so she had more time for the things she enjoyed doing, of which she hoped sewing would become one.

honestly, I'm like, so looking forward to going part-time because, you know, even though it means a drop in salary and stuff, like quite a significant drop in salary, it means that I will have time to do this. And I'd much rather be sewing and making like, you know, I'm quite happy. *Jenny (2)*

Having realised how time consuming sewing could be, particularly as a beginner, Jenny suggested that having more spare time for her sewing might also help her to be more relaxed about making mistakes:

And because I'll have more time [when part-time at work], it won't matter as much if I mess things up. I think ... because my time is so limited at the moment, it's a big deal that everything takes me so long or, you know, that I

might spend hours on something and then not ... it not work out. Whereas there'll be less pressure when I've got a bit more time. *Jenny (2)*

Despite her hopes, Jenny's work in advice services had become more intense as a result of the pandemic and her move to part-time working was delayed.

The sewing experiences that participants shared with me also highlighted a link between time and motivation. In her third ViEW encounter Rasa reflected that the structure of the project had given her 'such a great excuse' to sew and that although she wanted to continue, she may need to put some 'things in place' if she was to maintain that motivation and make time for sewing in future (R3). Wendy had expressed a similar sentiment in her Introductory Workshop. When I sought to reassure her that my PhD was not dependent on how well she got on with sewing, she joked that her sewing might be dependent on my PhD, as she had been wanting to start sewing her own clothes for a long time but had not, up to that point, found the time to do so. She commented in her third ViEW encounter that she found sewing enjoyable when she *gave herself time* for it.

Yeah, I think the time ... once I've given myself time, it's great, you know, I really enjoy going, right, this is what I'm doing at this point. This is the next stage. This is the next stage. And it's not actually that much. But I think probably the prep takes me longer than it should do. And hopefully that will just shorten as time goes. *Wendy (3)*

Sophie found she was much more motivated to sew when making something she thought she would wear once it was finished (as she did in the Third Making Period) than when making the test garment she had worked on over the two previous Making Periods. Again, this desire for the time spent sewing to result in a wearable item of clothing, as identified by Twigger Holroyd (2014, 2016) and introduced in Section 3.2, contradicts the common view, that participation in craft matters more to amateurs than what is made as a result of craft practice (e.g. Knott 2015, Jackson 2010). This contradiction reflects the extent to which clothes-related textile crafts such as sewing

are *both* alternative modes of clothing production *and* material craft practices. The extent to which home clothes sewing is seen and understood from either perspective – mode of production or craft practice – will have implications for how clothes sewing is experienced. That those making clothes at home do not want the time ‘invested’ (Martindale 2017: 56) to have been ‘wasted’ (Twigger Holroyd 2016: 289) – or the need to justify the time sewing has taken, to themselves or to others (Stalp & Winge 2008) – perhaps reflects a view of home sewing that privileges the ‘mode of production’ perspective.

This complex both/and position makes home sewing a valuable activity through which to view issues of fashion sustainability, particularly from a materialist, or more accurately, new materialist perspective (introduced in Section 2.2) which:

recognises the way concepts and experience, meaning and matter, emerge historically and reciprocally as embodied actors immerse themselves and engage with/within material and social environments. (Coole 2013: 455)

As Woodward and Fisher suggest, focusing on the materialisation of fashion – on ‘fashioning’ – rather than simply fashion, ‘highlights the way that commodification obscures and mystifies material relations’ as Marx identified (2014: 7). A new materialist orientation, which extends beyond Marx’s historical materialism – which involves ‘theoretical deductions based on 19th-century models, narratives and ontology’ (Coole 2013: 466) – would recognise activities taking place within the home as both meaningful and material and in doing so would invite a more complex analysis of what it is to make clothes for oneself at home in the twenty-first century.

As we have seen above, the participants’ stories of finding, making and taking time for sewing reflect the materialities of their everyday lives, the spaces they live in, the work they do and the material trade-offs they make to maintain motivation and fit the activity – something they mostly enjoyed and wanted to get better at – into the time available. If we look closely at craft as an aspect of everyday life we reveal, as Dormer (1997a), Adamson (2010) and Frayling (2011) all identify, that craft and industrial

production are not so different after all. Both are material practices, entwined with the socio-economic and socio-material realities – or mater(real)ities – of everyday life. I will explore this idea further in the sections that follow and in the conclusion to this thesis.

Material costs and fabric consumption

It is evident that sewing can become an expensive hobby. Making clothes at home from new materials has not been a cheap option since the 1980s (Schofield-Tomschin 1999). Martindale finds sewing to be a potential driver for overspending, as opposed to money saving, amongst the sewists in her study. This finding illustrates the dissimilarity between past austerity-related practices and much contemporary home sewing (Hall and Jayne 2016). The practices of sewing may have changed relatively little but the economic, social and political context within which they take place (and consequently who is involved) are seen to change over time (ibid.). However, the expense or otherwise of sewing depends how it is approached and what fabrics and resources are used. Martindale identifies the ‘substantial monetary investment’ that the sewists interviewed in her study made in fabric, patterns, equipment and other sewing-related items (2017: 51). Although this spending was something that her interviewees enjoyed and felt they ‘deserved’, they also expressed feelings of guilt, most often in relation to unused fabric.

By contrast, participants in my research appear to have been more concerned about cost and material consumption. Alison (I) noted that sewing could be quite an expensive hobby, particularly for a beginner. Rasa mentioned in her Introductory Workshop that when she first told her parents of her plans to start sewing, they were concerned that it would be an additional expense for her, before she reassured them that the project would initially pay for materials. Thandi’s (I) concerns about expense and potential waste had discouraged her from buying fabric online – ‘I’ve never bought fabric online because it is such a big investment that I am a little bit scared of taking the leap and I want to be sure’. Martindale’s interviewees acknowledged that ‘social media often prompted their purchases’ (2017: 52). As so much of the inspiration for contemporary home sewing practice is mediated through

commercialised spaces of Instagram and other social media platforms, it is easy to see how inspiration might quickly become aspiration linked to consumption.

In contemporary consumer cultures, strong links are made between our material possessions and our sense of identity, as Woodward (2007) clearly demonstrates with regard to the buying and wearing of clothes. This connection between consumption and identity is central to Campbell's notion of the 'craft consumer' (2005). The word 'craft' as used by Campbell does not relate necessarily to craft products but to products of all kinds that are assembled (in the sense of being curated, combined or personalised, more often than constructed) as a means of self-expression – or as the crafting of the self. Phase I interviewee Thandi linked the purchase of an overlocker after making just a few items to her commitment to sewing, which she felt was 'creeping into being part of [her] identity'. In her first ViEW encounter Wendy spoke about 'feeling like a professional' when she received her first sewing pattern through the post, even though this was some time before becoming involved in the project and starting to sew.

One of Martindale's (2017) interviewees spoke about buying patterns and fabric as a 'form of compensation' when she had not had time to sew (2017: 52). This seemingly counter-intuitive acquisition could be understood as a means to maintain the 'sewist' aspect of identity in the absence of sewing practice. Stalp and Winge suggest the resulting fabric 'stash' – defined as 'the overstock of raw materials used to make cultural objects' (2008:198) – 'legitimizes a hand crafter's identity' but is also another thing that crafters find themselves having to defend along with the time and space for their craft activities (2008: 200). Based on the experiences of the interviewees in her study, Martindale concludes that 'the act of shopping for sewing-related items was just as important to sewing participation as was the actual sewing' (2017: 52). This contrasts with some of the experiences of the beginners involved in this study who, as seen above, were generally more concerned with cost as well as environmentally impactful consumption.

During the project both Rasa and Wendy had acquired some patterns and/or fabrics for free from others who no longer had use for them. Rasa had been given some curtains and a collection of sewing patterns that had belonged to a friend's grandmother. Wendy had been helping her mother clear out a craft space she no longer used and was sourcing some of her fabric from there. Perhaps based on her mum's experience, Wendy seemed conscious of the common temptation for sewists to acquire more fabric and patterns than they would ever use. She mentioned a couple of times trying to stick to using what she already had and even suggested that a lack of space might be helping her in this.

I can see why people get excited about saving patterns and things like that, that they may or may not ever use, same as fabric. And I guess the lack of space that I've got is probably my best friend at the minute in sort of saying, right, just use what you've got. *Wendy (3)*

As we saw in Section 5.2, Phase I interviewees Elly and Thandi were both considering ways to use up rather than accumulate excess fabric, suggesting they may take up quilting amongst other strategies:

Like, what do you do with all this excess fabric that you create and all the extra waste that you create? So, there's always trying to find other things to do with the fabric. I know there's a maker called Closet Core patterns, and I will probably make one of these and a lot of people do, it's to collect all their waste fabric and she has a pattern for this massive pouf, and apparently it takes quite a lot of fabric to stuff it. I know a lot of people will make that ... So I will keep scraps, different sized scraps. I'll probably just do some quilted inspired thing in the future as well. *Thandi (1)*

Whether either of these women adopted these additional textile craft practices I do not know, but I am interested in the connection being made between clothes sewing and associated textile crafts that use up left over fabric rather than become potentially expensive hobbies in their own right. Elsewhere online, particularly on Instagram,

where content from popular indie brands circulates and contemporary home sewing culture appears to thrive, it is common to see intimations of compulsive and limitless consumption expressed along with the fun and excitement of sewing. In many ways this narrative mirrors that of the fast fashion ‘haul’, a feature of contemporary fashion culture that has also emerged through social media. A recent post on Instagram from the popular Tilly and the Buttons pattern brand, asking ‘how many is too many?’ (Figure 37), typifies this ‘compulsive and limitless’ narrative in which time, money and the embedded environmental cost of the materials used to sew clothes are absent, or at least obscured.



Figure 37 - How many is too many? Asking for a friend... Tilly and the Buttons [Instagram], 11 January. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/tillybuttons/>

Making the same item of clothing several times is one way to practise sewing techniques. Repeat makes offer the possibility of improvements with each garment, as Jenny indicated when talking about wanting to find a top pattern that she liked:

If I've got one style of top that I really, like, I'm quite happy to just have 17 of those [laughs] ... in all different colours and fabrics ... it might take me 16, like

not very good ones to actually get one that I can wear out of the house but that just means I've got 16 pyjama tops, so I'm fine [laughs]. *Jenny (2)*

As we saw in Section 8.3, making something that might be worn is often a more attractive and motivating proposition than making a test garment, especially if time is short. But for those concerned with cost and/or material waste, sixteen less-than-ideal items may not be a viable or acceptable outcome from their sewing activity.

In contrast to the 'compulsive and limitless' narrative, the participants and interviewees involved in this study often indicated desires not to waste – whether time, money or materials. Even Jenny's sixteen fictional (or as yet unmaterialised) tops were still imagined as being in use within the home. This sense of being responsible for the materials used and the items created recurred in the stories that other interviewees and participants told about their sewing. As seen in Section 7.2, Steph returned her first garment to the sewing box when she realised it was not really wearable. Later on she was thinking about ways to fix another dress so that it might be wearable beyond a carefully posed debut photograph in the garden. Both Adam and Krish, interviewed in Phase I, spoke about garments that had not worked out as intended being repurposed into other items – a shirt made from too stiff a fabric turned into a bag in Adam's case, and an imprecisely constructed T-shirt converted into a jumper for his daughter in Krish's. When deciding what to make and how to make it, the desire not to waste fabric was an important consideration for Rasa. Her dilemmas about how to proceed with her New Look skirt in the First Making Period (see Section 6.7) and her disappointment with the wrap top based on a video tutorial in the Second Making Period were both linked to a desire not to waste the nice fabric she had chosen at the beginning of the project. Wendy, who had over-ordered fabric for her first garment – out of caution in case anything went wrong – was happier with the way the Cuff Top she made in the Second Making Period had fitted within the amount of fabric purchased and left little waste (Figure 38).



Figure 38 - Wendy cutting out pieces for her Cuff Top in the Second Making Period.

In the Phase I interviews, Thandi summed up where, for her, this desire not to waste fabric came from:

I think that because a lot of us [people who sew] are also coming from like a sustainability point of view, so if you are also making a lot of waste it feels wrong. *Thandi (I)*

In their desire not to waste good fabric Rasa, Steph, Jenny and Sophie all chose to make test garments from old sheets or duvet covers at some point during the project. Wendy considered the advantages of doing this in the First Making Period but realised she would never find the time and should instead ‘just do the one that [she] want[ed] straight away’ (W2). Later, Wendy identified that while she liked the idea of repurposing fabric like that from an old duvet cover, she did not feel she was ready for that, because she needed the reassurance of the selvedge edge to guide the cutting of her fabric. The selvedge edge, highlighted in sewing pattern instructions as the easiest reference point for the fabric grainline, is an example of the way in which written instructions, when used as tools for learning to sew, preference the use of virgin materials off the roll. Similarly, the lay plans included in pattern instructions, which guide the positioning of pattern pieces to be cut from the fabric, offer the simplest

illustration of how this might be done. However, even if followed, these lay plans do not necessarily minimise fabric use for all garment sizes.

The knowledge required to identify the grainline of a fabric without a selvedge edge, or the principles to bear in mind when trying to cut pattern pieces from the minimum fabric, require more lengthy instruction than the written resources accompanying most patterns are designed to provide. Without additional advice, aspects of sewing practice that might make it more versatile and less wasteful – and so more materially efficient or ‘sustainable’ – are not readily passed on through written instruction, and can add to the material costs of sewing as a hobby and/or an alternative source of clothing. The kind of knowledge and material awareness that facilitates more materially sustainable and cost effective sewing practices is more readily passed on in person, or surmised from engagement with materials in practice. There is plenty of information about sustainable sewing practices online if one knows what one is looking for, but this information may not be apparent to those first starting out.

8.4 Material awareness

The participants’ experiences of sewing during Phase II were ‘material’ in the sense of being both physical and consequential. Starting to learn to sew had influenced how these participants viewed the clothes in their wardrobes and in the shops. Even through their relatively limited experience of garment making, it appears that aspects of material awareness and some behaviours relating to clothing use and purchasing had started to change.

Fixing and altering things

Sophie, who learnt to use a sewing machine for the first time during the project, had used it to fix a T-shirt for her partner, something she said she would never have done before.

I certainly feel more confident with using the machine and ... just for example, when my partner's t-shirt had a hole in under the armpit. I was like, Give it to me, I can do it, easy. It was just instead, things like that I wouldn't have even ...

it's not that hard is it really, but obviously if you've never used the machine, you don't know how to do it. Before I wouldn't do it. So even just for things like that, I think this is probably a skill that will be helpful to me in future. *Sophie (2)*

When I asked Sophie if her sewing experience had changed how she viewed things in her own wardrobe and whether she might use her sewing skills in other ways, she could see herself fixing more items and throwing less away.

Oh, yeah, like definitely. Anything in my wardrobe that has ... Yeah, got a slight rip in it or even if it's stretched or maybe needs adjusted, I would feel quite confident in being able to do that which is good, isn't it? Because it basically means that stuff that you'd perhaps just throw out in the past, you can just quite easily fix it. Like really simple things like just the t-shirt that [her partner] had. It was so easy to just stitch it because it was underneath the armpit. *Sophie (3)*

Wendy also said she felt more confidence to try adjusting garments already in her wardrobe, especially in response to weight fluctuations, which both she and Jenny indicated were an issue in relation to their consumption of clothing. Wendy could see being able to alter clothes as a way to give garments a 'longer life' (W3).

Seeing things differently

After making her first garment and struggling with zigzag finishing the fabric's raw edges, Wendy described looking through her wardrobe and noticing the quality of finish of some of the garments she found there.

I have been looking through some of my clothes, and it's like, oh, wow, some of the stuff that I've just picked up on holiday and stuff like that is terribly, terribly made. That's why it hasn't stuck together or stayed together very well. *Wendy (1)*

When I asked Rasa in her third ViEW encounter if having started sewing she felt differently or looked differently at clothes at all, she spoke about looking at the silhouettes and fit of clothing more:

looking at the seams and seeing how stuff is made or looking at the silhouettes and seeing whether ... how it's going to be shaped or non-shaped has been interesting. Like even look at some Primark garments and being like this ... you're pass ... you're passing this on as a dress and you're expected this tiny string to do all the fitting and it just doesn't look good on most people because they actually aren't two dimensional. *Rasa (3)*

Sophie mentioned paying more attention to the details of clothing and being better able to tell whether things were made well. When we first spoke about buying fabric, having seen on the group WhatsApp that some others had purchased theirs online, Sophie concluded that she would rather buy fabric somewhere she could feel it first.

just thinking of ... like clothes that I bought, you know, there's many things that I've got that I've seen online that look good, and then they come and the material's completely different or it's really thin or you know. So based on that would be enough reason for me to actually go and see the ... go and feel it and see the fabric myself, I think. *Sophie (1)*

Having recently gone with her boyfriend to buy a suit, Rasa also mentioned noticing seam finishes more, which was giving her a new appreciation of the skill involved in making clothes:

I remember looking inside the suit and be like, Oh my god you can't see any seams, no, not seams, no stitches, nothing, everything's concealed as in lining [...] I was very impressed by and intrigued with ... when in clothing that's made well, made with a lot of time and care put into it, like you can't actually see any of the seams and what that takes is another whole different skill. *Rasa (3)*

Buying and not buying things

Jenny's first experience of sewing had an impact on her shopping habits. Having made one pair of pyjama shorts out of old sheet fabric, Jenny joked that all her pyjamas might be made that way in future because she found the homemade ones so comfortable.

the fact that I've started sewing means I've stopped ... like pyjamas were the one thing I used to buy all the time, and then always be like, oh, I don't have pyjamas ... that are comfortable enough or whatever. Whereas now, I've stopped buying pyjamas because it's like, no, I can make my own. So that's good. So it stopped me spending money unnecessarily on things like that, and buying fast fashion as well. *Jenny (2)*

Having always struggled with shopping for clothes, Jenny spoke about how looking online at what others were making was helping her.

one of the things that I've always found most challenging with shopping, you know, apart from the sizing thing and my giant boobs ... is um find, like, finding stuff that I actually like because everything's either too frilly or too plain. And it's like I want you know, I think I want things that are quite graphic and you know, like angular, not flowery and stuff like that. So it's been really good to see people making stuff with those kinds of fabrics and then go okay, so now I know where to look for those. And kind of using the internet rather than relying on what's in the local shops and things. *Jenny (2)*

basically just getting a better idea of what I like, is the best way to explain it. It's like, figuring out what it is that I actually like having spent my whole life, like actively avoiding thinking about fashion or things like that, and you know, just buying stuff that'll do, kind of thing, rather than things that I ... you know, because I've never really found stuff that I really, really liked. So yeah, so it's that it's that kind of exploration. *Jenny (2)*

Jenny felt that her purchasing habits had been changed by knowing it was possible that she might one day be able to make clothes that fit her. She felt she was buying fewer clothes or buying better clothes on the basis that she might be able to alter them as her weight fluctuated in future. Phase I interviewee Thandi had also indicated that having started to sew she was more reluctant to buy clothes that so often did not fit, although she acknowledged that learn the necessary fitting skills might take her some time.

Yeah, and I feel like why would I buy something that is really badly fitting when I don't have to. I mean, that's not taking into consideration the amount of time I am going to have to put in but ... [laughs]. *Thandi (I)*

Like Jenny, Rasa's interest in sewing had partly arisen from the knowledge that the content of her wardrobe did not 'excite' her (R2). Her early experiences of sewing, especially gaining an insight into some of the complexities of achieving a fit for her body shape, had made her more aware of the skill involved in making clothes and the skills she might want or need to learn if she was going to be able to make things she really wanted to wear. Rasa had found herself shopping for clothes more since starting to sew, which was the opposite of what she had hoped might happen. Although not sure whether there was a 'correlation' between her sewing and her shopping, Rasa emphasised that the things she had bought – some wide-legged jeans, a hot pink Lucy & Yak boiler suit, a mesh top and a halter dress from an indie maker on Instagram (Sophie Nancy) – were all garments that at her present level of sewing skill she would be unable to make.

When Rasa spoke about these items she emphasised their qualities in ways that reflected her material awareness, her 'sustainability' concerns and her desire for more feminine clothes that would fit her. She highlighted that the jeans had a particular silhouette created by the stiff fabric, which she liked but might struggle to sew. Likewise, the mesh fabric of the purchased top was not something she felt she could sew. When Rasa spoke about her boiler suit she emphasised that Lucy & Yak was 'an independent company, so not fully fast fashion' (R3) and that the boilersuit was fun,

comfortable and something she was getting a lot of wear out of. The dress, which was promoted on Instagram as being made to personal measurements, was yet to arrive when we spoke. By the time of the in-person workshop Rasa again reflected on her shopping habits and attributed them to being young and having disposable income for the first time in her life. Rasa was still very keen to learn to make clothes that she could and would wear but recognised there was more skill involved than she had initially envisaged.

8.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered ‘materiality’ in different ways. I have focused on physical materiality, highlighting what happens when bodies and the material objects they encounter in the process of sewing coincide in time and space. I have also considered ways in which this physical materiality interplays with the virtuality (or digital materiality) of the online spaces where much inspiration, information and instruction for sewing is gleaned. These different materialities are entwined as materials, material practices and cultural artefacts (including physical and digital resources) come together in material contexts circumscribed by the materialities of everyday life.

The video clips I discussed with Rasa, Steph, Wendy, Jenny and Sophie during VIEW encounters provided glimpses of embodied experiences of learning to sew clothes at home. The clips also highlighted the situated nature of the participants’ sewing experiences and the degree to which material objects were active rather than passive in those experiences (Woodward 2020). Focusing on the materialities of these beginners’ experiences invites a critique of the culture within which home sewing is commonly encountered. The new generation of patterns and instructions designed, in part, with beginners in mind attract people to sewing with the promise of enjoyment as well as the potential for better-fitting, more individual and/or more sustainable clothes. However, the inherently material and embodied – physical, messy, complex and sometimes frustrating – nature of sewing is not readily reflected in these resources or foregrounded in the videos that beginners use in conjunction with them when learning to sew. How it feels to sew and the material outcomes of sewing are

both personal and context specific – different for everyone each time. In this sense, to use Steph's example (in Section 8.2), the competence to sew the patch pocket to the pinafore dress is distributed (Dant 2006, Watson & Shove 2008) between the instructions, the sewist, the machine, the fabric and the circumstances within which the sewing takes place. These experiences of sewing are intensely materially entwined, with material factors determining how enjoyable (or even viable) home clothes sewing is for people inspired initially by what they see online.

There is much about the visual representation of home sewing and contemporary sewing tools that is not 'futuring' in Fry's (2009) sense of nurturing and inculcating more sustain-able ways of being. The representation of sewing as quicker and easier than is commonly experienced, in videos that are decontextualised, speeded up and heavily edited, is one factor. Contemporary sewing tools that reduce direct material handling (e.g. rotary cutters, pattern weights, clips in place of pins) or replicate the aesthetics of mass production and dispense with making techniques that are responsive to differing material qualities (e.g. overlockers) are another. Stiff paper patterns are less 'empathetic' to the material qualities of fabric, or to the body in the process of fitting, than tissue-paper patterns. The stiff patterns work better as templates for speedy reproduction than guides for understanding fabric and clothes in relation to the individual body. While contemporary tools and resources make aspects of sewing easier for some beginners, they tend to do so by reducing the need for the direct material engagement that is so instructive of any craft and so vital to the versatility of craft skills. The tools and resources designed for home sewing inform how sewing is practised. By only partially replacing the more traditional tools that sewing requires (such as scissors, pins and sewing machines) these contemporary tools also increase the monetary and environmental cost of sewing practices. The 'compulsive and limitless' narrative around home sewing legitimates and perpetuates a culture of more material use rather than pointing people towards the 'landscape of LESS' that Earth Logic (2019) suggests and degrowth requires. On the other hand, the experience of the beginner sewists in this research suggests that even limited engagement with home sewing can lead to an enhanced material awareness and changed perceptions and behaviours in relation to clothing.

These material factors have implications for who is attracted to home sewing, how it is practised and any meaningful role home sewing might have to play as a tactic in the transition towards more sustainable fashion futures (Payne 2021a, 2021b). The role of home sewing as a tactic is the theme I will pick up in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 9 – CONCLUSION

Literature relating to fashion and consumption too rarely brings perspectives on production and consumption together (McRobbie 1997, Entwistle 2015). In so much fashion literature the wearers of clothes are viewed primarily as consumers, while the producers of those clothes are left largely unseen. Even Martindale's (2017) study of home sewing motivations, to which I have made frequent reference, is undertaken from a consumer perspective. My research was designed to focus on wearers of clothes as they also sought to become the makers of those clothes. In sticking closely to that intention, the study brings a distinctive maker-wearer perspective to debates about home sewing, amateur craft, and fashion sustainability. In this conclusion I will provide a summary of findings, a brief analysis of their relevance and contribution to knowledge, and some thoughts on the potential for future work. Before doing so, I will frame this conclusion with examples of ways in which learning to sew clothes influenced the relationships those who participated in the study had with clothes in the making, in the wardrobe and in the shops.

9.1 Becoming a sewist

The following five vignettes are drawn from the final reflections that the Phase II participants shared with me, mostly during their Phase III Follow-up Interviews. These interviews took place in July 2022, around 18 months after the women had first become involved in the project and between four and nine months since we had last spoken (depending on whether they had attended the In-Person Workshop).

Rasa had continued with some sewing projects since the Phase III workshop. She had hemmed some of the fabric pieces for the Shirred dress she was making based on an online tutorial. She had bought some extra Shirring elastic based on tips she had picked up from a recent episode of *Sewing Bee* and a contestant turned sewing vlogger demonstrating an alternative approach to making a similar dress. Reservations about the thickness of the fabric she was using and finding the right machine settings for Shirring were, Rasa suggested, factors that might have limited her willingness to progress the project further. In the meantime, she had hemmed some trousers, using

instructions from a Readers Digest sewing manual that she had bought secondhand. Although she had not found the written instructions clear or the task easy to visualise, she had found a way to sew the hems more securely than before and had brought the trousers back into use.

A third project that Rasa shared with me was some alterations she had been making to a dress she had bought online. When the dress had arrived it was clearly too big but, unusually for an online purchase, Rasa said the material ‘for once actually felt nice’, so she had decided to keep it. Having made some tentative alterations to the side seams and the shoulders, Rasa was starting to wonder if she might also need to adjust the puff sleeves, which she felt were making her ‘look really wide’. She was looking again at Evelyn Wood videos for guidance on the ideal order for making garment adjustments and concluded she might need to fit the garment more fully, even adding darts and a zip if she was really going to be happy with how it looked on her body.

When I asked Rasa if there was anything she felt she had learnt about clothes through trying to make them, she reflected on how much harder sewing clothes was than she had envisaged even though, having watched other people sewing online, she already thought it might be difficult. Rasa said she was looking more closely at the seams of shop-bought clothes to see if she could ‘recognise and understand’ their construction and whether ‘a good job has been done or not’. The experience of starting to learn to sew had led her to reflect more on the problems of fast fashion:

Like it's just more and more glaringly obvious, the fact that people ... how fast the fashion industry works and how fast we buy clothes and usually get rid, apparently. And how cheap they are. Again, it's just more and more ridiculous or seems ... just with knowing how much time it actually takes ... or takes a newb[ie] (as in me) coming to figure it out. And to realise that people do this like super super fast is just ... obviously the quality won't be there. Obviously living conditions and wages and that should be a lot more important. It's not ... it's just not sustainable. *Rasa* (F)

Rasa concluded that her experiences of sewing had given her a ‘new found appreciation of sewing as a craft’. She had previously articulated a need to access ‘that sort of realm of knowledge from before’ (see Section 8.1) and expressed an interest in attending local workshops in future.

Wendy had also continued sewing. Inspired by the In-Person Workshop, in which we had focused on making use of fabric scraps, Wendy had used offcuts to make some reusable make-up remover pads. She used the ‘annoying double gauze’ fabric from the pyjama bottoms from the First Making Period, and found the softness of it ideal for this new purpose. She had also started making a dressing-gown style robe, guided by an Instagram reel that demonstrates where to cut, fold and sew the fabric using a folded piece of paper. Wendy was attracted to this pattern-free project because she found tracing and cutting from patterns ‘takes a lot of space and some headspace’ and she liked the idea of working in a way that required less ‘discipline’. However, she recognised that ‘all that prep’ if ‘you do it right’ might achieve a better result. Having watched the reel ‘100 times’ and written down the process, Wendy had made a tentative start using a piece of silky fabric that she described as ‘slippy’ and ‘not fun to cut, or iron, or keep still’. The fabric was a piece she had chosen as a teenager and recently retrieved from her mum’s fabric stash. When Wendy spoke about these two projects she emphasised how the make-up remover pads were functional and the robe was ‘zero-waste cos it's just one long bit of fabric’ and also an item of clothing she definitely needed.

Wendy mentioned two other projects. Before moving house she had started tracing out a pattern for a Tilly and the Buttons dress which was going to be her first attempt at working with stretch fabric. The other project was impromptu and had arisen after she had bought a secondhand pleather jacket on eBay that turned out to be very worn. The seller refunded her and suggested she just ‘throw it in the bin’, which was not something Wendy was comfortable doing. She had bought the jacket because she needed one and had chosen pleather over leather because she was vegetarian. Having been left with the jacket to deal with, Wendy reflected on the nature of the material: ‘I bet that wouldn't happen on a leather jacket and all this is just, you know, a sort of

plastic front'. Inspired by an image that frequently popped up on Facebook of a satin jacket with a fabric patch on the back, Wendy had tried to do something similar to 'revive' the jacket. This project had not gone quite as Wendy hoped – she suggested she might have benefited from more forethought about the fabric used, more skill, patience or a different kind of needle – but her recent experiences of sewing had given her the confidence to try. The jacket was returned to Wendy's 'stash' for another day.

Wendy hoped to do more sewing when she moved house again and had more space, but acknowledged that she was placing a lot of emphasis on having space and that only time would tell if having the space would enable her to sew as she envisaged. For the time being Wendy was keeping her sewing machine out and doing small projects like the make-up remover pads to remind herself that sewing was something she enjoyed doing. When I asked what Wendy felt she had learnt from starting to sew clothes, she described being more aware of how different fabrics feel and fall on the body and reflected on two conversations about the style and look of homemade clothes:

I think we all said at one point, that we've made something that we're like, ok, but I don't want to wear it. I've just ... it's just a style that's there. So it's probably like, you know, knowing your own style and trying to go with that rather than thinking about what's going to be easy because what's the point in an easy thing if it's unwearable. And I'm pleased that I started with pyjamas and I was talking to someone about this robe and saying, you know, it's for indoor use, you know. And I think my sister said well, if it's too neat, you could have just bought it and you want something with a bit of character, you know. This is our ethos now. *Wendy (F)*

Jenny was keen to continue sewing and was planning to sign up for some local classes at the same workshop that her niece was attending, rather than continuing to try learning at home. In the meantime she had been gifted two sewing magazine subscriptions and was collecting patterns that she liked. Jenny was still following a number of sewing-related social media accounts, which were helping her to think

about what she might want to make in future and also build her confidence to choose the styles (colour and pattern) of fabric she might want to use. When I asked Jenny whether starting to learn to sew had made any difference to how she viewed, used or purchased clothes, she said she was being more mindful about what she bought:

I've definitely been still staying away from the kind of fast fashion stuff, partly as well because I've got a better understanding of how hard they work. There's these workers in countries that supply clothes to Primark and stuff like that and yeah, get paid nothing for it. It [sewing] has made me more mindful of that, but as yet it hasn't changed in terms of what I wear or anything like that. It's more that I'm just more mindful about what I buy. *Jenny (F)*

Jenny said she was now more willing to spend money on better quality clothes that might last longer, because in future she might be able to alter them where needed. Jenny had thought that sewing clothes would be easier than it had turned out to be and had not been prepared for the challenge that fitting clothes to her body shape would present.

Jenny said she had learnt a lot about herself from trying to sew clothes, particularly about the way she works, about needing things to be set out right before she could get started and how challenging she found it to work from the written pattern instructions. Although Jenny's experience of sewing during the project had been limited, she was clear about what would motivate her to carry on:

The most satisfying thing is actually ... like I only managed it once ... that I actually finished something and having something that I can then wear was just amazing. Uhm, and really exciting, so yeah. I think it's so rare like with the way work and stuff is nowadays it's so rare that you can actually start something and finish it and then see a finished product. So like in my work, it's just constantly ... It doesn't matter how much stuff you get done, there's still more stuff than you can ever do. So being able to like start something and then you know within a week or so have a finished product is, yeah, can't be

underestimated - the power of that when everything else in life is so ongoing.

Jenny (F)

Having discussed the enjoyment her niece was getting from learning to sew and drawing on her own experience of working in advice services, Jenny suggested that ‘sewing and financial management education, of how you actually budget and things like that, are two things that would make a massive difference to kids. If there was ... If it was better represented in schools, definitely’.

Sophie said she had opted to take part in the research at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic meant there was not much else to do and lots of people were taking up new hobbies to keep themselves entertained. She was attracted to learning to sew because she had been becoming more aware of sustainability issues in fashion and thought sewing would be a useful skill to have:

I think I was being quite ... becoming quite conscious of just like the sort of sustainable side of things, you know, and fast fashion. And it's just I'm trying to buy less things and I think that was a bit of a motivation because I wanted to be able to make things that were fitted in a way that I wanted or the exact design I wanted, rather than, you know, just buying stuff all the time. *Sophie (F)*

Sophie had recently worn her Stevie dress and been complimented on it. She said she had found being able to make ‘something that’s unique, that no one else has’ and being able to say ‘I made that’ was the most satisfying thing about sewing. When she spoke about her involvement in the project she said how much she had enjoyed it and how proud she was of what she had learnt: ‘I'm so glad that I've proven to myself that I can self-teach. It was a lot more difficult than I thought it would be, so I'm really like proud of myself for doing it’ (SoF). Despite this positive experience, a lack of time due to work commitments and a lack of dedicated space for sewing limited the likelihood of Sophie continuing to sew new clothes. She really liked the idea of one day having a space where she could sew or engage in other creative hobbies, such as drawing and painting, that she had enjoyed when she was younger. Having to set up space in the

kitchen for sewing made it less appealing and after working at a desk all day she was usually keen to get out of the house.

Although Sophie started her Follow-up Interview saying she had not done any sewing in the nine months since we had last spoken, she went on to tell me about a number of ways she had been using sewing skills to mend, alter and adjust existing items of clothing: repairing the odd tear, making an alteration to a dress bought for a friend's wedding when there would have been no time to return or replace it, and turning up some trousers. Like Wendy, Sophie said she was more confident in doing these things because her experience of trying to make clothes had made fixing and altering other items seem less complex than it had before. When I asked Sophie if learning to sew had changed the way she viewed, used or purchased clothing, like Rasa and Wendy, she said she had started paying more attention to how clothes were made:

And I think ... just when I was making the garments I was just sort of paying attention to like the stitching and I obviously I see on my garments now ... like, it's a certain way. I'm like OK, that's sort of material doesn't fray and it's done that way so you can't see the edge, like, just things that you wouldn't really pick up on before. Just a bit more attention to detail, I think. *Sophie (F)*

Sophie also asked about local sources of more sustainable fabric and mused about the possibilities of making new items from old as a way to avoid using new materials if she were to continue sewing. She said she had already started keeping fabric that might be useful in the future, like the denim she had cut from her jeans when she had made them into shorts after spilling glue on them during a recent DIY project. When I mentioned at the end of the interview that I had been thinking about the kind of space that might be useful to people who wanted to sew but did not have the space, Sophie immediately made a connection to her work and could see sewing spaces as a valuable community resource:

I'm sorry, I'm just thinking about the work I do. Because I work to reduce inequalities. Lots of people, lots of people that sort of won't be able to afford a

sewing machine or won't have the space. So it would be nice if there was more like communal things like that where they could just stop, go in and access it and ... where they might not be able to otherwise. *Sophie (F)*

Steph was the first participant to finish her involvement in Phase II. She attended the In-person Workshop but did not take part in a Follow-up Interview. By the end of Phase II Steph had started another job in addition to her hairdressing and bringing up her two small children. Despite this, between her last ViEW encounter and the In-person Workshop Steph had made another dress from a Tilly and the Buttons pattern (see inset Figure 39)

During the project, Steph had made adaptations to a couple of the garments she made when they had not quite worked out as intended. Steph told me during her third ViEW encounter that she had started to use her sewing skills to make adjustments to clothes already in her wardrobe so that she would be more likely that she would wear them.

I had a dress that I took to Cornwall, and it's a really nice dress, summer dress. And it had a triangle panel in. It had a little button that fastened it but it just came down just a touch too low for me. Something very minor ... at first when I ordered it and tried it on I was like, you know, I kept moving myself and I thought I don't want to be like flashing obviously. And I thought, Ah I won't take it and I thought no you can sew it. So I took that quite high up back to the triangle and you know it didn't move at all [when it was on] then, it just stayed where it should.

But yeah, so it's little things like that, that I now will be like, I don't like that. I've got a slit in a dress that I don't ... I love the dress but then I don't like the split, so I think I'll sew that together. So yeah, there are things now that I would never have done that. Yeah, you know, and well, especially with the one I just said I took up, I'd have done that hand sewn but now I've got a machine I'm like yeah, it's done in five minutes. *Steph (3)*

When I asked Steph if she had learnt anything about clothes through trying to make them, she said:

if I go to a shop, for example ... I'll see something on a hanger, I think about it different now. I'm like, oh my God, you know, this ... the person, whoever's made this. I think I have started thinking differently about things and how they hang. And, do you know, like going back to like the notches and different things, how it sits on your body, or why it sits, do you know what I mean. *Steph* (3)

I'd rather spend the money on the fabric to make myself now rather than going spending money on ... or I'd rather see something in a shop and go, I might try that, you know, take a picture of it and ... I know it doesn't work like that. But yeah, I don't know. It has made me think differently about shopping for my own clothes, now I've got the confidence to attempt something myself. *Steph* (3)



Figure 39 - Steph during the Phase III workshop. Recently made dress inset.

In common with several of the other participants, Steph recognised herself as a practical or visual learner who learnt best from being shown how to do things. Based on her experiences of sewing during the project Steph, like Jenny, had concluded that she would benefit from attending an in-person course and had identified one that she hoped to attend.

9.2 Material encounters

Rasa, Wendy, Jenny, Sophie and Steph’s experiences of sewing seem (at least temporarily) to have enhanced their material awareness and altered their perception of the clothes in their wardrobes and in the shops. Material engagement theory suggests that through working with materials we are also changed by them, as mind and material are co-constitutive of embodied knowledge (Malafouris 2019). Even through their relatively limited experience of sewing, the participants in this study appear to have gained sensibilities that inclined them towards more sustainable behaviours in relation to fashion. Although previous research has emphasised homemade garments being held up to scrutiny in relation to ready-made clothing (Twigger Holroyd 2017b), this research suggests that for those who start sewing their own clothes these comparisons might work equally strongly, the other way around. Through experiences of making clothes and making assessments about the wearability of the clothes they made, these beginners became more aware of the material qualities of clothes, including the ‘6Fs’ of fashion, fabric, fit, form, functionality and finish (see Sections 7.3 and 7.4), which are reflected in the above vignettes. This study suggests that engagement in the embodied practice of sewing clothes enhances material awareness that can lead beginner sewists to look at shop-bought clothes with greater curiosity and criticality. Enhanced appreciation of sewing as a craft – a more embodied understanding of what it takes to construct clothes – makes the garment workers involved in the mass-production of clothing more visible.

9.3 Summary of research findings

Chapters 5–8 present findings in response to the first three research questions set out in Chapter 4. I will repeat them here for ease of reference:

- How are basic sewing and clothes construction skills learnt at home?
- What resources help people to learn basic sewing and clothes construction skills?
- How does learning basic sewing and clothes construction skills change amateur sewists' relationships with clothes?

In Chapter 5 I identified that in contemporary UK culture, common experiences of learning to sew clothes involve a hybrid mix of on- and offline resources, often used at home alone. In common with other, more consumer focused studies (Martindale 2017, (Schofield-Tomschin 1999) aspects of personal fulfilment are found to be core motivations for sewing. People sew as a way to be more creative, learn a new skill or create better-fitting or more individual clothes. In this study, concerns relating to issues of sustainability, although not necessarily the sole or primary reason for wanting to sew, are also shown to be a common motivating factor. A new generation of sewing patterns and online resources make learning to sew at home alone a possibility. These resources and the online culture surrounding home sewing make the craft appear attractive and accessible, with social media providing inspiration for sewing and for what is sewn (particularly for women).

In Chapter 6, I expanded on the kinds of on- and offline resources that beginner sewists use. I identified different kinds of online videos that beginners in this study encountered in the process of learning to sew. The content of these videos was seen to vary greatly in the level of expertise portrayed and the skill with which it is conveyed. While some of this online video content is explicitly designed to support amateur sewists in their endeavours to learn to make clothes, some of what is viewed is more self-promotional and/or performative in nature (either by accident or by design) and acts more as entertainment than instruction. This chapter identifies some limitations in using video in relaying the 3D practice of clothes sewing to amateurs via a 2D screen-bound medium. Experiences of learning to sew using resources on- and offline are shown to be affective. Positive affect is associated with the realisation of wearable garments and the learning of new skills, while negative affect is linked to decision making from positions of uncertainty and material aspects of making that are outside the makers' immediate control (due to knowledge, skill or circumstance).

In Chapter 7, building on the finding that positive emotions are associated with the making of wearable garments and the learning of new skills, I explored the concept of ‘wearability’ in relation to home-sewn clothes. In Part I of that chapter, based on beginners’ experiences of making garments that they considered wearable, I identified six factors – fashion, fabric, fit, form, functionality and finish – that contribute to the wearability of home-sewn clothes. These six factors feature in maker-wearers’ reflections on the items they have made and link to the practices and techniques encountered in the process of making them. In Part II, I considered the cultural context within which home sewing is encountered and ways in which this may impact the physiological and psychological wearability of home-sewn clothes and the likelihood of these items being worn. Issues of personal style, the affordances of fabric, the centrality of the body and the relative aesthetics of homemade clothes were all discussed, highlighting the combination of designerly and makerly skill involved in the construction of clothes that will be worn.

In Chapter 8, I expanded on the theme of materiality. Adding to aspects of materiality already discussed in Chapter 7 – the physical body and the affordances of fabric – this chapter considered the experience of home sewing in context: that is, in relation to the materialities of everyday life that circumscribe how sewing is practised within the home. Focusing on what happens when material bodies and material things coincide in space and time in the making of clothes, this chapter revealed the active role of material objects – tools and materials – in experiences of learning to sew. The challenges of finding space and time for sewing and the material costs of engaging in home sewing were all discussed, as they influence how and whether people sew and whether the experience is enjoyable or sustainable within the constraints of their everyday life. Chapter 8 also introduced evidence that enhanced material awareness, gained through experiences of learning to sew, has a material impact on relationships with clothes. The vignettes at the start of this concluding chapter provide further evidence of those changing relationships.

9.4 Stitching it all together

Having summarised the findings of this research in response to my first three research questions – addressing how sewing skills are learnt, the resources that help people to learn them and the difference that learning makes to their relationships with clothes – in this section I will address the fourth question, regarding the role of home sewing as a tactic in the transition to more sustainable fashion futures.

Sewing as sustain-ability

My research suggests that even relatively limited experience of learning to sew clothes can have an impact on how clothes are viewed, purchased and used. It is impossible to claim whether these impacts will be lasting, but for participants in this study they certainly appear to have been significant. Changed perceptions of clothing may not in all cases have led to reduced consumption but appeared to have enhanced the material awareness of the Phase II participants, as Goode's (2016) auto-ethnographic piece suggests they might. This enhanced awareness changed the way participants evaluated clothing, made them more aware of the materialities of clothing production and appears to have given them a greater sense of agency in their clothing choices and/or greater confidence to intervene in the clothing they already owned. As emergent sewists, these women showed signs of becoming less 'ideal' consumers – as Burman has suggested of 'dressmakers' in general (1999: 7). Learning to sew clothes can be seen as a sustain-ability – an ability that enables people to behave more sustainably – in two ways: in using sewing skills and in using enhanced material awareness as a critical tool (Bain 2016, Twigger Holroyd 2017b). This study, therefore, adds to evidence found elsewhere (e.g. Clark 2019, von Busch 2008, Twigger Holroyd 2013, Hackney et al. 2020) of textile craft skills and possible routes to enhanced sustainability being closely intertwined.

However, this research also supports Twigger Holroyd's (2017b) suggestion that any link between home sewing and sustainability is not intrinsic. The sustainability of home sewing practices, in the sense of material efficiency, changed behaviours and reduced consumption, depends on how sewing skills are learnt and what they are used for. In some cases, home sewing can lead to increased consumption of materials. The

crafters' stash (Stalp & Winge 2008), the making of more clothes than would otherwise be bought, fabric consumed in the making of test and failed garments in the process of learning, all add to material consumption. On the other hand, concerns about cutting into and/or wasting fabric, a sense of responsibility for what is made and a desire for the clothes that are made to be worn are all also strongly evidenced in Phases I and II of this research. For home sewing skills to be more effectively nurtured as enduring sustain-abilities, I suggest, may require a slightly different cultural context – or 'cultural milieu' (Willett et al. 2022) – to that most evident to beginners, particularly online.

The digitally entwined craft resurgence of the twenty-first century – typified by the proliferation of online communities and access to vast amounts of online video demonstration – has made individualised learning possible. However, contrary to the initial optimism of the web 2.0 revolution, this has not necessarily generated an enhanced collective wisdom, as the tools through which online content is encountered and navigated prioritise nebulous 'engagement' over quality information (Gauntlett 2018). Amongst the enormous amount of sewing-related content online – along with almost everything you could possibly want to know about sewing if you knew where to look – there is much that functions primarily as entertainment; enjoyable and encouraging to view but less than adept at conveying craft skills or promoting truly sustainable sewing practices (see Sections 6.4 & 8.3). As we saw in Chapter 5, contemporary sewing culture makes the sewing of clothes seem possible and desirable. In its upbeat and encouraging tone, this culture and its online spaces emanate hope – of garments created to suit oneself. For those who choose to try sewing for themselves, the reality of making wearable clothes proves to be more complex than is commonly imagined, as we saw in Chapters 6 and 7. There is, I suggest, a risk of affective alienation (Ahmed 2010) for those experiencing this mismatch of expectations, especially when the materialities of everyday life – time, space and money, discussed in Chapter 8 – are also taken into account.

There is much within the popular portrayal of home sewing on TV, online and in sewing resources promoted to beginners that would not be considered 'futuring' (Fry 2009) – that is, designed to nurture sustain-able futures by making sustainable

behaviours an obvious or preferable choice (see section 2.1). The downplaying of the craft involved and the centrality of the body to the making of wearable clothes, the ‘compulsive and limitless’ narrative (Sections 7.9, 6.7, 8.3), the lack of design and material awareness apparent in some of the DIY Cut & Sew projects shared online (Section 6.4 and Appendix 16) and the variable quality of the advice to be found there all lead towards practices that are neither materially sustainable nor culturally ‘futuring’. As Tony Fry suggests:

The external world of commodities [also read commodified online spaces] arrives and often undermines sustaining characteristics of the present and blocks sustaining characteristics of the past. Of course commodities do not arrive as mere objects but as projected desires deemed to be able to convert dreams to reality. They are directed at the young, many of whom have lost respect for a culture they have only experienced in the form of its damaged afterlife ... when they encounter fragments of what once were sustaining traditions, which have been abandoned by their parent’s generation. The nostalgia of elders offers them nothing. In such settings, the prospect of recovering the past as the future seems neither viable nor attractive. Yet the past remade anew as the sustainable has real potential. (2009: 102)

The new generation of sewing resources supported by online video content has made sewing more attractive to a new generation of would-be sewists. Indie patterns have made sewing patterns more visually enticing. With a narrative tone, their instructions appear less dogmatic and more appealing on a personal, seemingly relational, level. Contemporary patterns dispense with some more technical details of clothing construction, which, based on personal experience, I suggest home sewists of previous generations may have ignored all along. However, these newer resources have not substantially altered either the craft of clothes sewing or clothes themselves. The skills, techniques and knowledge involved in turning two-dimensional fabric pieces into three-dimensional garments for everyday use have remained very similar for at least the last 50–60 years. Rather than reinventing sewing, these new resources have primarily repackaged clothes sewing as a fun (and often, it is claimed, sustainable) way

of producing clothes at home, while often making the craft skill involved in the process of sewing less immediately apparent.

It is clear that seeing others practice a craft is a route to being able to interpret instructions and engage in a craft oneself, but the way in which the importance of video is emphasised, including by the participants in this study, hints at an underlying perception that some people can, and somehow once did, learn to make clothes from written instructions alone. If this is a lingering perception, then it is a misreading of what came before (Bratich & Brush 2011). Opportunities to witness and learn from unedited experiences of clothes sewing and the craft it involves were once more common, embedded as sewing once was in our culture, economy and everyday lives. To recognise this is not to give in to the pull of nostalgia but to acknowledge the entangled materiality of craft learning and the entwined nature of craft and community, which applies as much to clothes sewing as any other craft practice. Access to online video demonstration has not been the revolution it might appear to be. It is a substitute for what was once more present and close to hand. At a time when interest in sewing seems still to be on the rise, and many – like the interviewees and participants in this study – are motivated, at least in part, by wanting to live and act more sustainably, it seems worth considering ways in which the *craft* involved in clothes sewing, as much as the clothes produced, could be made more explicit and no less fun – i.e. exploring the potential of ‘the past remade anew as the sustainable’ (Fry 2009:102). The structural and design challenge suggested here would be to place clothing sustainability concerns over those of speedy clothing production, not just co-opting the language of sustainability but embracing the materiality and attendant ‘slowness’ of craft – just as Fletcher suggests of slow fashion more generally, as an invitation for system change, embracing slowness in an ontological sense (2010).

Material entanglement/Embodied knowledge

Despite sewing patterns, both indie and commercial, relying on standardised templates and written procedural instructions, home clothes construction remains the ‘workmanship of risk’ rather than the ‘workmanship of certainty’ – more craft than manufacture, requiring ‘judgement, dexterity and care’ (Pye 2010). As the participants’

videos and our ViEW encounters revealed, there are an enormous number of minute, and, I would argue, ‘creative’, decisions that must be made to materialise a garment in 3D, whether from a pattern or not. As we saw in Chapter 7, the making of wearable clothes requires a combination of designerly and makerly skills to which the body and materials are central and reciprocally entwined. As the Phase II participants realised, you cannot learn to sew simply by watching others do so online or by reading instructions. In Ekström’s words, ‘[in] craft, skills and understandings are, by and largely, inseparable from embodied courses of craft activities – knowing craft is, in a sense, doing craft’ (2012:88).

The beginner sewists in this study were proud to have created garments that were tangible and unique to them. They took pleasure in learning, despite its challenges, and were proud of the new skills and knowledge they had gained, often through frustrating processes of trial and error. Had they been more aware of the bodily nature of craft learning and therefore the personal nature of craft knowledge before they started sewing, they might have been less surprised by the challenges that sewing presented them as beginners and more forgiving of their own mistakes and the amount of time that sewing took them.

If popular sewing culture was to nurture sewing skills more explicitly as sustainabilities, it would portray a more sophisticated understanding of what it is to learn a craft, including recognition of tacit knowledge as materially entangled and slow to acquire. Rather than wanting sewing to be quicker and easier than it is commonly found to be, because that is the way sewing is made to look, the on- and offline tools of such a culture would celebrate and emphasise tacit knowledge over the rapid and repeated reproduction of clothes. Such a culture would recognise tacit knowledge – not as knowledge erroneously ‘assumed’ by those writing sewing instructions (a common lament online) – but as knowledge one can only be guided or ‘bridged’ (Wood 2006) towards. It is interesting to note that, based on their initial experiences of sewing, three of the four Phase II participants who hoped to continue learning to make their own clothes concluded that they would benefit from attending sewing workshops or classes rather than continuing to learn primarily at home alone.

Nonetheless, the participants' material awareness appeared to be enhanced by the experiences they had, in ways that were significant to their relationships with clothes. I suggest that the materialities and affordances of tools and materials – which manifest as agentic capacities (Coole 2013) – are instructive of the sewist, as materials engagement theory suggests they might be. Through this sensory instruction, encapsulated in Ekstrom's (2012) suggestion that knowing craft is doing craft, the understanding of how materials and material objects 'behave' in relation to one another translate into tacit or personal knowledge of a craft known 'from the body' (O'Connor 2017). Through this material entanglement, awareness of materials and perceptions and possibilities in relation to clothing start to change. Through repeated interaction between bodies and materials a greater sensory and material intelligence (Adamson 2018) or material literacy (Dyer & Wigton Smith 2022) can be gained, that can impact on sewists' orientation to the material world.

This material entanglement of bodies, tools, materials and material contexts is where the literatures informing this study – from craft, feminist, new materialist and degrowth perspectives – intersect. The rejection of binary distinctions between body and mind, the centrality of the body to experiences and understandings of the world, and the consequent entanglement of matter and what matters, so obscured by our growth-centric culture, are pivotal to the sustainability challenge we face. Through engagement and close observation of sewing practices, the findings of this study highlight how these material entanglements and the centrality of the body to the sewing of clothes shape experiences of home sewing and any role home sewing might play as a tactic in the transition to more sustainable fashion futures.

Home sewing as a rewilding tactic

We have seen that sewing can be considered a sustain-ability in terms of the skills and criticality it can engender in people who sew. We have also seen that the current cultural context, within which people are often learning sewing skills as adults at home alone, does not necessarily support or preference clothes or making practices that are sustainable in and of themselves. If home sewing were to be considered a rewilding tactic (Payne 2021a, 2021b) in the transition to more sustainable fashion futures and

nurtured accordingly, then the culture and practices surrounding home sewing might change in a number of ways. If we accept that sewing is important for all the reasons that Barbara Burman sets out in her most recent writing (Burman 2023), and the very simple yet under-recognised fact that we all wear clothes daily, the seams of which have been sewn by someone, then, what might we do differently? We might take some of the strategies for sustainability identified by Alice Payne – e.g. ‘design for ethical production’, ‘design for sustainable use’ or ‘design based on producers’ skills and capabilities’ (2021:110) – and apply them to the sphere of home sewing. We may, as a tactic, nurture sewing skills as sustain-abilities through our own practices and the spaces, courses and resources we adapt, enhance or create, the relationships we build and the research that we do.

As we have seen, some of the information encountered online by would-be sewists is limited in its usefulness as instruction. Some of the Enthusiast and DIY Cut & Sew tutorials identified in Chapter 6 offer limited technical know-how and are less than expert in their presentation of this know-how. Some Performative videos are designed for purposes other than relaying craft skills via digital tools explicitly designed to maximise ‘engagement’. Many of those providing online tutorials and even a proportion of those designing downloadable patterns, it seems, have little or no formal design training (Martindale 2020). There would appear to be scope for more design expertise to influence the world of contemporary amateur sewing. The design of sewing spaces, resources, courses, workshops and online content aimed at amateurs could do more to acknowledge the material entanglements of home sewing and the centrality of the individual body to experiences of making and wearing clothes. In doing so, the learning of sewing skills could be made more accessible and meaningful to a wider range of people, including those who do not fit into the dominant demographic for current home sewing resources or sewing classes on- and offline.

Based on the experiences of the participants in this study, there are a number of aspects of design that could enhance the learning of sewing skills as sustain-abilities and help to make the clothes sewn more enduringly wearable and therefore sustainable:

- Opportunities and resources that prioritise design awareness (both aesthetic and technical aspects of how clothes work), personal style and style confidence, and fabric knowledge might usefully precede making practices and support sewing beginners to focus their efforts on making garments that meet their individual physiological and psychological wearability requirements. As we have seen (Section 7.7), mainstream fashion does not necessarily equip amateur sewists well for the challenge of knowing what they want or what might fit and suit them once it is made.
- The design of more size-fluid patterns for home sewing would enhance the likely wearability and longevity of home sewn garments in use, acknowledging the centrality of the individual body to the making of enduringly wearable clothes and accounting for changes of body shape and size over time (Townsend et al. 2017).
- More professionally designed and instructed pattern-free projects for beginners could help to promote understanding of how garments work in relation to individual body measurements, providing encouragement to those with less standard bodily proportions early on in their making experience. Similarly, more professionally designed zero-waste patterns for beginners would aid material efficiency and respond to the desire not to waste materials.
- Simplified versions of systems and techniques that aid the drafting of patterns with bespoke fit – such as the Lutterloh system used in the S4S project (S4S Project) or the Haslam system, popular in early to mid-twentieth century Britain (Buckley 1999, Wroe 2019) – could usefully be investigated as ways to support aspiring home sewists (like Rasa and Jenny) for whom fit is a considerable motivation for sewing but also a major barrier.
- The design of more diverse and flexible spaces for sewing, accessible and welcoming to amateur sewists of all kinds, could help to promote sustainable sewing practices and the sharing of skills, including between generations. As well as helping those interested in developing fitting skills, for whom solitary practice is prohibitive, this would respond to the limitations of video in conveying craft

skills and address the challenge of finding suitable space for aspects of sewing practice within the home.

These suggestions are made in the spirit of *Earth Logic* as aspects of design within the field of fashion that might be given greater priority if we are prepared to look beyond our current economic paradigm – to landscapes of ‘local’ and ‘less’ – in seeking to address fashion’s sustainability challenge (Fletcher & Tham 2019). If designed around the ‘five ways to well-being’ mentioned in Section 2.2 – social connection, curiosity, ongoing learning, physical activity and giving (or sharing) with others (Aked et al. 2008) – the kind of spaces referred to above could have benefits beyond the proliferation of sewing skills and sustainable practices. Of course, as noted in Section 8.3, the time and space to learn to sew is a luxury that many cannot afford. Given the degrowth context presented in Chapter 2, it is interesting that sewing clothes was one of the activities which seemingly increased when people (including some of the participants in this research) found themselves with more time on their hands during the pandemic. Amongst the proposals considered by those interested in reshaping our economic paradigm to fit within environmental limits are those for a universal basic income and a shorter working week in wealthier countries (Coote et al. 2021). A notion of prosperity based on ‘the “capabilities” that people in society have to flourish or to function well’, based on the work of economist and philosopher Amartya Sen (Jackson 2021: 57), would include people engaging in activities they in enjoy – which, this research suggests, for some might include home sewing.

9.5 Contribution to knowledge

This thesis embraces Twigger Holroyd’s idea of fashion as a commons in which we are all free to participate (2013). It places the voices and actions of amateur sewists – so rarely heard in fashion, design and even craft research – centre stage. In doing so it complicates the notion of DIY clothes sewing as a sustainable practice, challenges romantic notions of sewing as pure mindful enjoyment, and highlights issues of materiality that affect how home sewing is experienced, as well as who participates. The research sheds light on the making of material things and the relationship of clothing to body, so central to the desirability and emotional durability of clothes of all

kinds (Townsend & Sadkowska 2017) and the wearability of home-sewn clothes in particular.

This thesis provides an in-depth analysis of contemporary sewing experiences from a material craft perspective, rather than a consumer perspective, as is more common. By framing this analysis within the context of wider sustainability and degrowth debates – which identify the need for radical change in our economic paradigm, material use and everyday behaviours – **I have taken an original approach to investigating home sewing skills as sustain-abilities and considering how they might be nurtured more explicitly as such.** Arising out of this original approach, the thesis makes the following contributions to knowledge.

The combined journaling and video elicitation methods, brought together in the novel configuration of the ‘ViEW encounter’ that enabled the study to take place remotely, add a quasi-workshop dimension to existing ethnographic methods. This research approach proved effective for exploring practices undertaken within the home, where the ‘observer effect’ of a researcher present in-person would diminish authentic insights into the practice being studied. Participants’ self-videoing of craft practices in progress facilitated a unique view into their experiences of learning to sew. This method could be used effectively by others seeking to understand craft learning and practices taking place within the home.

The identification of six wearability factors – fashion, fabric, fit, form, functionality and finish – articulates the designerly as well as makerly skills involved in the realisation of wearable homemade clothes and the centrality of the body within both these spheres. By communicating the significance of material preferences and relationships to the wearability of clothes, the wearability ‘6Fs’ (see Figure 31 cluster diagram) might usefully be used as a matrix in research where physiological and psychological aspects of clothing and/or product design, construction, purchasing and use are of concern, whether in personal or professional clothing practice and design.

This thesis identifies the sensory-material entanglement of sewing practices as central to sewing’s potential as a sustain-ability and pivotal to any role clothes-sewing might play as a tactic in the transition to more sustainable fashion futures.

The affective experiences of beginner sewists analysed and documented in this thesis suggest that academic and experiential knowledge of craft learning and practice – particularly related to the development of tacit or personal knowledge – are under-recognised in popular sewing culture, even as that culture *appears* to celebrate the practice of sewing as a craft. The experiences of participants in this research inform a series of suggested design approaches that could be explored to enhance the learning of sewing skills as sustain-abilities, set out in section 9.4.

This thesis positions the learning of sewing skills as a rewilding tactic in the transition to more sustainable fashion futures and recommends action research that responds to this positioning.

The research adds to the wealth of evidence linking textile craft skills and sustainability by demonstrating links between engagement in sewing practices and enhanced material awareness and changed behaviours in relation to clothes. The thesis identifies ways in which clothes sewing skills might be nurtured more explicitly as sustain-abilities that incline home sewists towards sustainable sewing practices and behaviours in relation to clothes more generally. In particular, access to more flexible spaces for sewing is identified as a way to facilitate skill sharing between a greater diversity of sewists of different ages and genders. As suggested in section 9.4, the potential benefits of such spaces could extend beyond the proliferation of sustainable sewing skills, to enhance aspects of well-being that are compatible with a culture of ‘local’ and ‘less’.

9.6 Research limitations

The main participatory element of this research in Phase II draws heavily on the experiences of a narrow demographic of white European women in young to middle age. Although this group are the most visible amongst contemporary home sewists in the UK, I am aware that they are not the only people who sew clothes or may wish to. The findings do not attempt to generalise these experiences as universal; rather, they are presented as qualitative insights to inform further research and exploration. A

similar study conducted with a different demographic group would have yielded different insights.

The remote nature of the study (necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic), while effective in the circumstances, was not an ideal form for participatory craft research, which would generally benefit from greater in-person group activity. The ViEW encounters offered a unique and privileged view of the experiences of sewing beginners, which added considerable depth to the kind of information that interviews alone provide. However, the research asked a lot of participants and consequently (as noted in Section 4.9) resulted in inconsistent combinations of data (journal entries, video clips, still images) provided by each. The analysis therefore relies heavily on the ViEW encounter transcripts (being the most consistent source across the group) as the primary data source. Given the experiential and embodied nature of the subject matter, a more practice-led, in-person, co-design methodology may have offered more efficient and elegant ways to visually analyse and represent the research outcomes.

The use of pre-existing paper sewing patterns as a key resource throughout this project was informed by the experiences of interviewees in Phase I of the research and my own familiarity with such patterns as a user of them. I am aware that the historical lineage of paper sewing patterns, through to today's indie pattern brands, is strongly linked to mainstream euro-Western fashion culture and consumption (Spanabel Emery 1999, 2014). I am conscious that skills for many more sustainable approaches to sewing have a different lineage, arising from cultures in which ingenuity and/or thrift are necessitated or celebrated (Twigger Holroyd et al. 2023, Young 2020, Moseley 2001, Buckley 1999, Tulloch 1999). There are cheaper and less materially wasteful (that is, more materially sustainable) ways of sewing and learning to sew than those often portrayed or encouraged in contemporary sewing culture and explored in this study. As highlighted throughout this study, there are limitations to the exploration of 3D material practices via a 2D screen-bound medium. A study based on in-person workshops might have allowed for exploration of more diverse range of resources and approaches.

9.7 Further work

There are many other avenues of research that might be pursued in relation to amateur clothes sewing. Linked to some of the limitations highlighted in Section 9.6 above, research exploring experiences amongst sewists from different cultural backgrounds and different demographic groups would be interesting to contrast with the findings of this research. As noted in Section 5.6, it would be particularly interesting to follow the experiences of men learning to sew in the contemporary UK context. The limited insights provided by the two men interviewed in Phase I suggest there is more to say about the cultural positioning of home sewing as a gendered skill and the limitations of western clothing and clothes sewing patterns designed for menswear compared with womenswear. The limited sewing-related online content and marketing aimed at men who sew means that the social media experience and associated drivers for consumption are less present for men and would therefore be interesting to contrast with the experiences of women.

It would be interesting to use the '6Fs' wearability matrix as a precursor to sewing activities in a participatory action research study to see how exploration of these wearability factors in relation to existing wardrobe items and clothing preferences might support beginners to adopt sustainable sewing practices. It could be equally interesting to explore the matrix with non-sewists to see how and whether it might influence purchasing decisions or clothing use.

Some initial suggestions of design approaches to explore through further participatory research are set out in section 9.4 above. These approaches could draw on the best of what already exists to building craft research knowledge into thinking about fashion and resource design for home sewing, including its online presentation and promotion as well as its in-person practice.

I am keen to continue exploring the intersections between amateur clothes sewing, craft, design and sustainability. I am particularly interested in working with others inside and outside academia in doing so. I see potential for this work to build on the findings of this thesis, particularly in relation to the material entanglement of craft

practices and the centrality of the body to making processes and perceptions of clothing wearability. I see this work coalescing around the theme of ‘our bodies, our clothes, ourselves’¹⁹ and to progress through action research undertaken from a feminist perspective. Based on the findings of this research, which align with those of the S4S study (Hackney et al. 2021, Saunders et al. 2019, Willett et al. 2022), such an approach would contribute to the sharing and learning of sewing skills as a tactic in the transition to more sustainable fashion futures.

9.8 Conclusion

In the *Craft of Use* Kate Fletcher identifies dressmaking as largely ‘the preserve either of [the] highly skilled “crafter” or a badge of youthful experimentation, rather than a widespread and accepted fashion practice’ (2016: 61). Between those two characterisations there appear to be many people (not all youthful) who would like to be able to make their own clothes. This research engages with some of those people and follows their experiences of ‘fashioning’ (Woodward & Fisher 2014) in the ‘fashion commons’ (Twigger Holroyd 2013). By bringing cultural and material aspects of clothes making together in the maker-wearer’s hands, this research highlights the potential of home sewing as sustain-ability (Fry 2009), not as panacea but as a rewilding tactic in the transition to more sustainable fashion futures (Payne 2021a, 2021b). Seeing clothes in the making, in the wardrobe and in the shops, through beginner sewists’ eyes, I conclude that home sewing can be a valuable tactic, not least because it can make the materials our clothes are made from and the hands of the people who stitch our seams more visible.

¹⁹ Taking inspiration from the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective, whose influential work under the banner ‘Our Bodies Ourselves’, in the field of sexual health, from the 1970s onwards built on women’s lived experiences and understanding of their bodies.

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Appendix 1: Matter – Material – Materiality – Materialism – Materialist

matter, *n.* - An event, circumstance, fact, question, state or course of things, etc., which is or may be an object of consideration or practical concern; a subject, an affair, a business.

matter, *n.* - That which has mass and occupies space; physical substance as distinct from spirit, mind, qualities, actions, etc.

material, *adj.* - Of serious or substantial import; significant, important, of consequence.

material, *adj.* - Of or relating to matter or substance; formed or consisting of matter.

material, *n.* - Cloth, woven fabric.

materiality, *n.* - The quality of being composed of matter; material existence; solidity.

materiality, *n.* - Material or physical aspect or character; outward appearance or externality.

materiality, *n.* - That which is material; (in plural) material things.

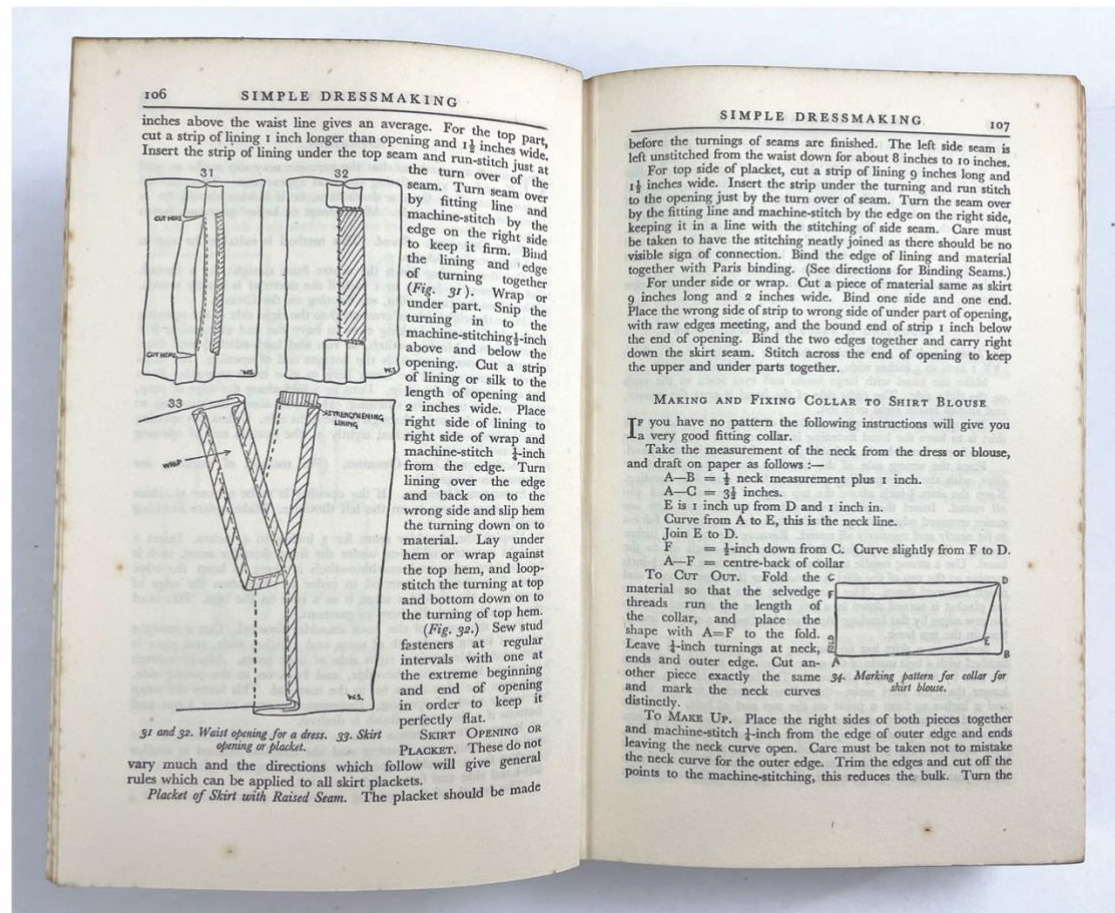
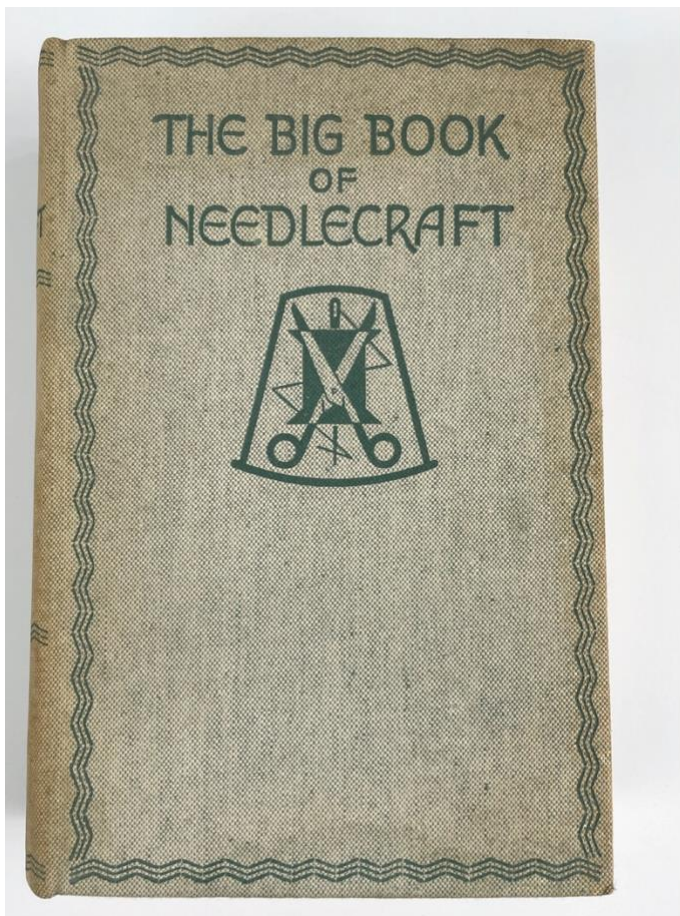
materialism, *n.* - An emphasis on or preference for that which is material, at the expense of spiritual or other values; (now) esp. the tendency to treat material possessions and physical comfort as more important or desirable than spiritual values; a way of life based on material interests.

Also in *Philosophy* - The theory or belief that nothing exists except matter and its movements and modifications; (more narrowly) the theory or belief that mental phenomena are nothing more than, or are wholly caused by, the operation of material or physical agencies. In use: e.g. 1996 Economist 20 July 89/3 'You will inevitably gravitate to one of the two great poles on the mind-body problem: yea-saying, physics-can-explain-mind materialism and nay-saying, mind-is-special dualism.'

materialist, *n.* - A person who favours material possessions and physical comfort over spiritual things; a person who adopts a materialistic way of life.

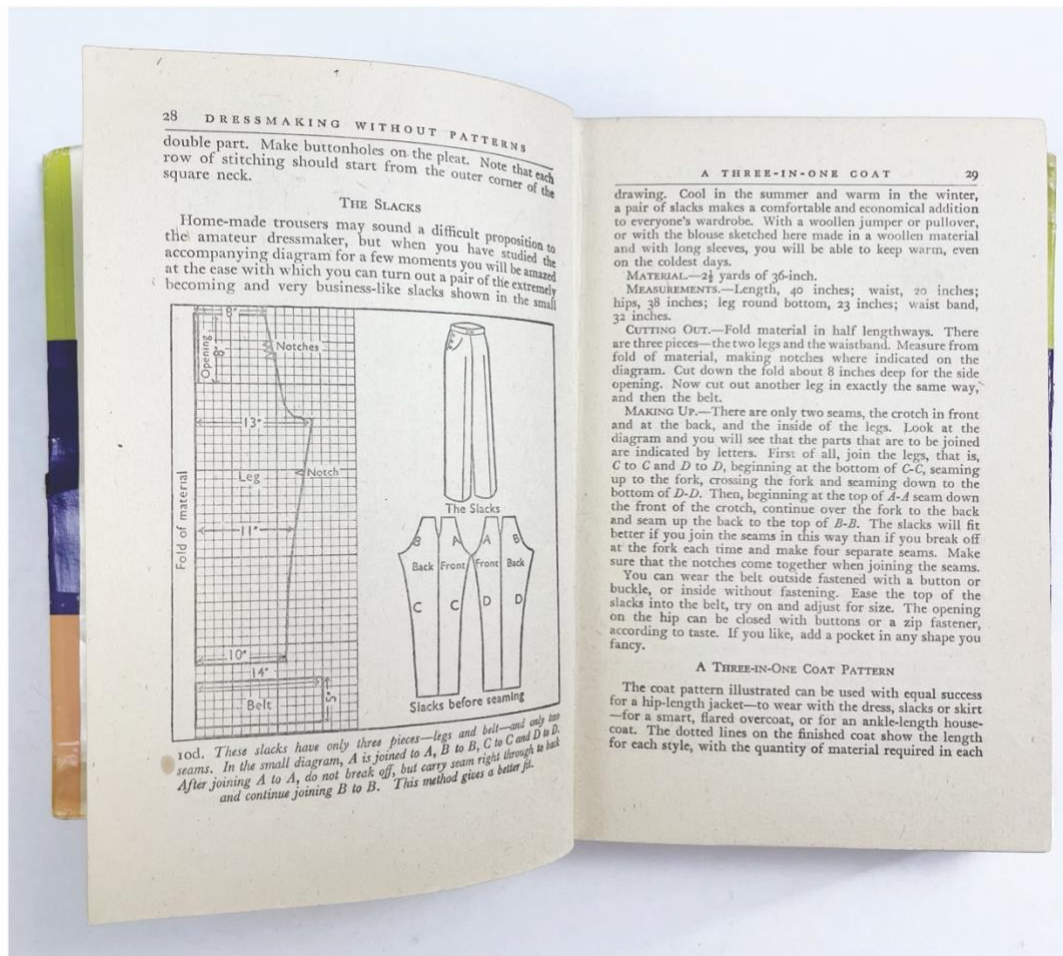
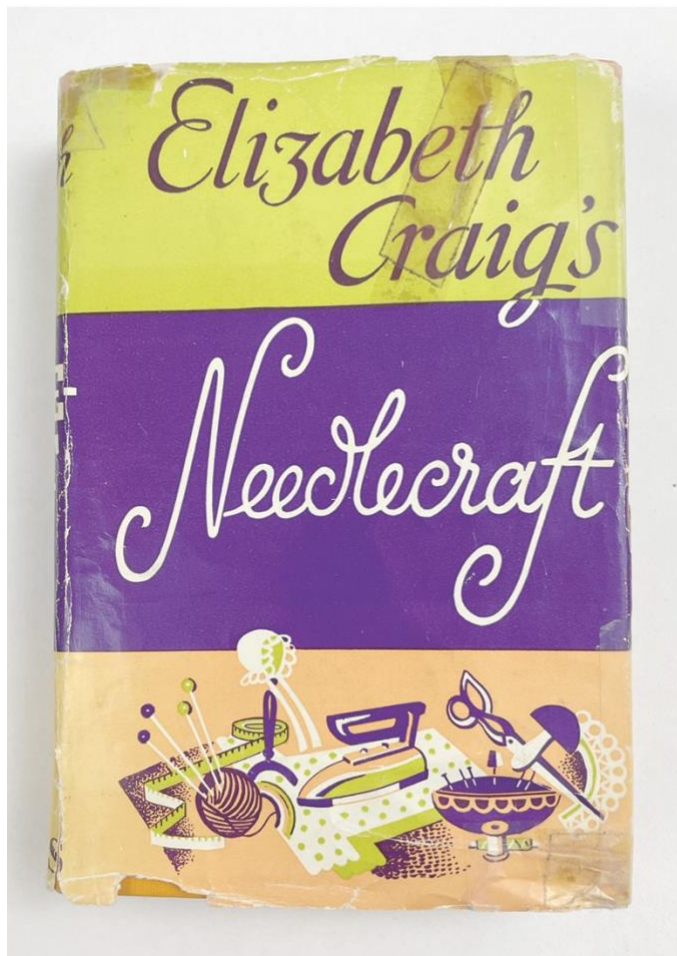
materialist, *adj.* - Of, relating to, characterized by, or advocating materialism (in various senses); materialistic.

Appendix 2a: The Big Book of Needlecraft – Annie Paterson c.19378



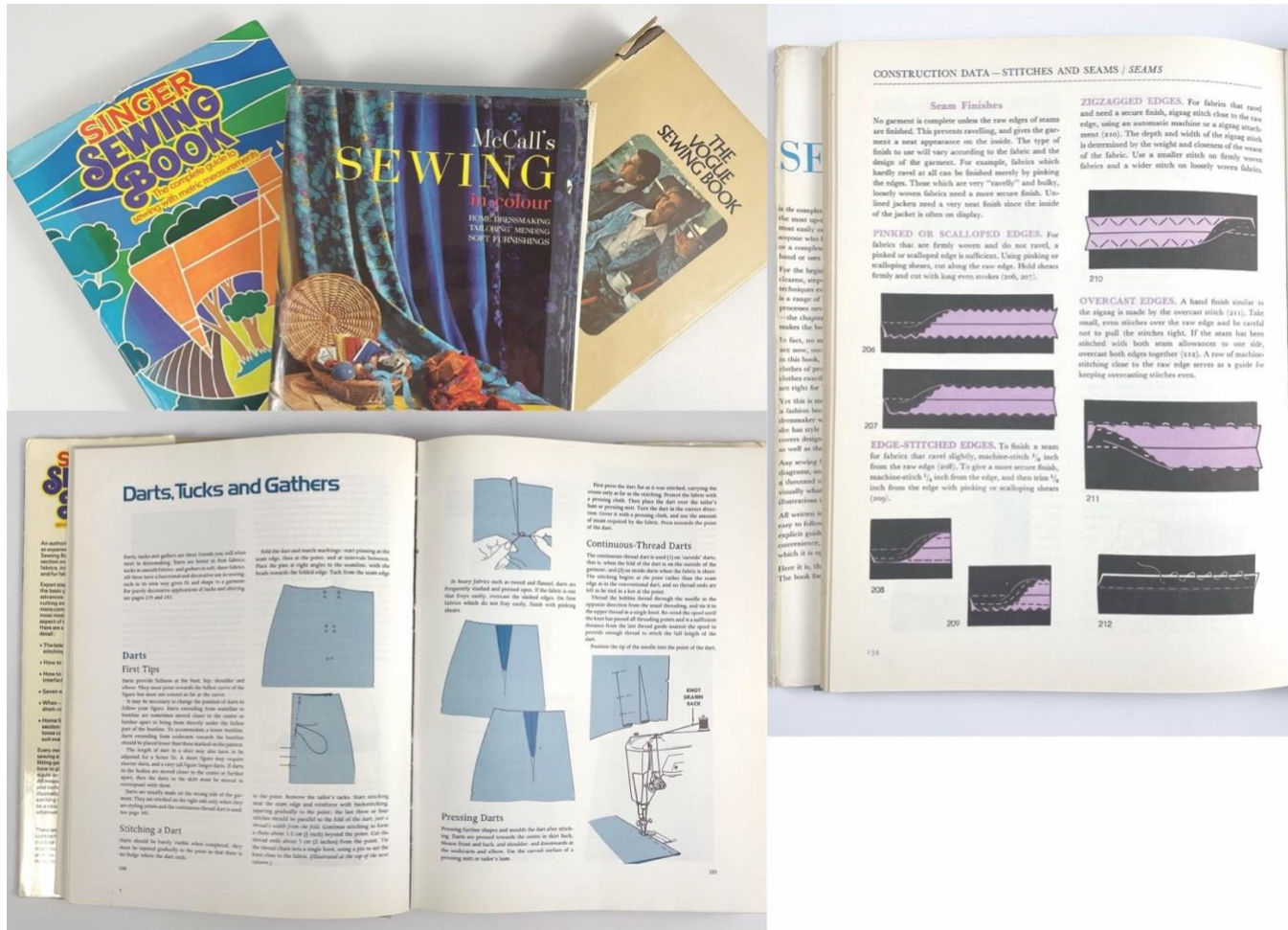
Paterson, A., c.1937/8. *The Big Book of Needlecraft*. London: Odhams Press.

Appendix 2b: Needlecraft: sewing and knitting from A-Z – Elizabeth Craig 1947



Craig, E., 1947. *Needlecraft: sewing and knitting from A-Z*. [1952 Reprint]. London: Collins.

Appendix 2c: Sewing manuals – Singer, McCall's, Vogue, 1960s and 1970s



Singer Sewing Book: the complete guide to sewing with metric measurement, 1975. London: Book Club Association.

McCall, 1963. Sewing in colour: home dressmaking, tailoring, mending, soft furnishings. London: Paul Hamlyn.

Vogue Sewing Book: Revised Edition (The), 1975. New York: Butterick Publishing Div. American Can Company

Appendix 3 – Phase I interview schedule

Pages 1-3

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: Learning to Sew Clothes for Yourself
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research and for returning your consent form.• In line with that consent, if you wish to withdraw from this interview at any point you are welcome to do so.• Can you confirm that you are happy for this interview to be recorded (audio only)?• I'd just like to remind you that the audio recording of this interview will be transcribed and anonymised so that you will not be identifiable from the resulting data.• The interview will take between 30-60 minutes.• Do you have any other questions before we go ahead?
Choosing to sew clothes:
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ask about reasons for wanting to learn to sew clothes.<ul style="list-style-type: none">- style/fit- individuality- quality- sustainability- hobby- other
<ol style="list-style-type: none">2. Ask about experience of sewing prior to deciding to learn to sew clothes.<ul style="list-style-type: none">- at home- at school- friends & family- other
<ol style="list-style-type: none">3. Ask about experience of other crafts/creative pursuits prior to deciding to learn to sew clothes.
First experiences of sewing clothes:

4. Ask about the first garment(s) made, including any highlights/low lights.

- type of garment
- type of fabric
- positive experiences
- negative experiences
- resources used (eg. pattern/tutorial etc.)
- skills learnt
- outcomes

Resources used/referred to:

5. Ask about the kinds of resources used or referred to in experience of making to date

- patterns
- books
- online tutorials
- online community advice
- friends and family
- other

6. Ask about experience of the resources used to date.

- positive
- negatives
- preferences
- desires

Reflections and future plans

7. Ask about the most satisfying and most challenging aspects of learning to sew clothes.

8. Ask about plans for future making and learning.

- plans
- desires
- limitations

Closing the interview

Thank you for responding to all my questions.

Is there anything else you feel you would like to add?

Would you like to receive a copy of the transcript of this conversation once it has been typed up?

Thanks again for your time.

Appendix 4a – Call for participants



Call for participants:

Want to learn to sew clothes for yourself in 2021?
Planning to learn at home but not sure where to start?

If you think you would benefit from a bit of a kick start and would be happy to record and share your learning experience, this research study could be for you.

I am looking for sewing beginners who are over 18 and have never made a garment before.

The study will take place over 4-6 months. I will give you support to get started on your first garment and then ask you to test out some other sewing activities.

The making you do will be guided by you.
Some tools and resources will be provided.

If you think you might be interested email sallysewandso@gmail.com or sign up here for an introductory info session - either [Tuesday 2nd Feb](#) or [Monday 8th Feb](#) at 6-7pm - so I can tell you more about the research and what it will involve.

Please share if you know someone else who you think might be interested.

This research is being conducted by Sally Cooke from Nottingham Trent University as part of an Arts & Humanities Research Council funded PhD research project looking at links between sewing and sustainability

Appendix 4b – Call for Participants on Instagram



sallysewandso I am looking for sewing beginners to work with in a participatory research study. I'm specifically looking for people who are over 18 and to have never made a garment before.

Want to learn to sew clothes for yourself in 2021? Planning to learn at home but not sure where to start?

If you think you would benefit from a bit of a kick start and would be happy to record and share your learning experience, this research study could be for you.

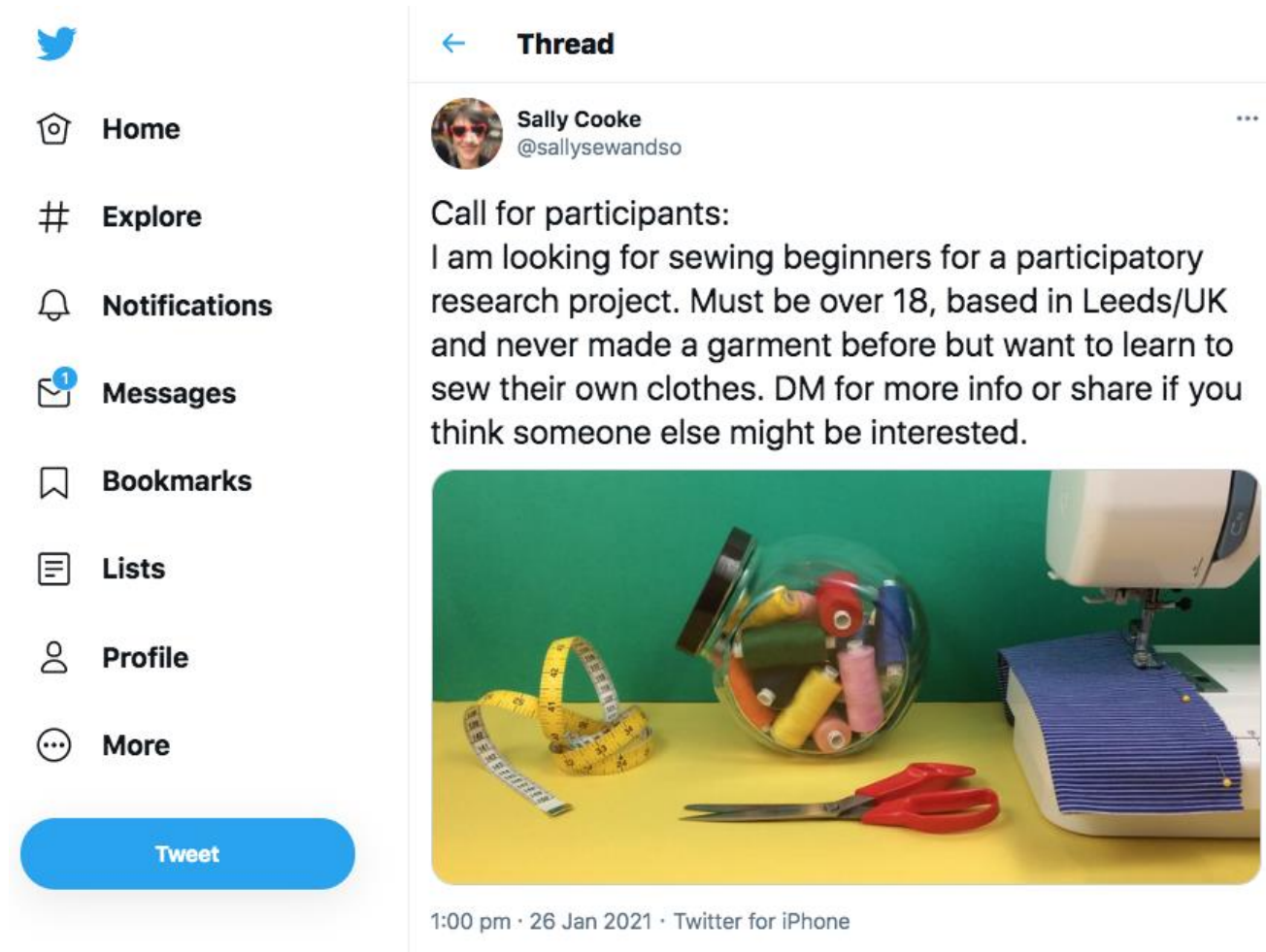
The project will take place over 4-6 months. I will give you support to get started on your first garment and then ask you to test out some other sewing activities.

The making you do will be guided by you and some tools and resources will be provided.

If you think you might be interested get in touch. I am running two (no obligation) info sessions - Tuesday 2nd Feb and Monday 8th Feb 6-7pm - where I can tell you more about the research and what's involved.

Please share if you know someone else who you think might be interested.

Appendix 4c – Call for participants on Twitter



The image shows a screenshot of a Twitter thread. On the left is the Twitter navigation sidebar with icons for Home, Explore, Notifications, Messages (with a '1' notification badge), Bookmarks, Lists, Profile, and More. Below the sidebar is a blue 'Tweet' button. The main thread area shows a tweet from Sally Cooke (@sallysewandso) with a profile picture of a woman wearing sunglasses. The tweet text reads: 'Call for participants: I am looking for sewing beginners for a participatory research project. Must be over 18, based in Leeds/UK and never made a garment before but want to learn to sew their own clothes. DM for more info or share if you think someone else might be interested.' Below the text is a photograph of sewing supplies: a glass jar filled with colorful spools of thread, a yellow measuring tape, a pair of red-handled scissors, and a white sewing machine with a blue fabric being sewn. The tweet is timestamped '1:00 pm · 26 Jan 2021 · Twitter for iPhone'.



- Home
- Explore
- Notifications
- Messages
- Bookmarks
- Lists
- Profile
- More

Tweet

Thread



Sally Cooke @sallysewandso · 26 Jan
Call for participants:
I am looking for sewing beginners for a participatory research project. Must be over 18, based in Leeds/UK and never made a garment before but want to learn to sew their own clothes. DM for more info or share if you think someone else might be interested.



22 231 194



Sally Cooke @sallysewandso

Replying to @sallysewandso

OH WOW - THIS GOT A RESPONSE! Thanks to everyone who got in touch or retweeted. For now I have as many responses as I can handle. So many would-be sewers in the world, kinda warms the heart. Also, suggests I may be researching the right thing at the right time. Thanks everyone!

12:13 pm · 28 Jan 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

Appendix 5 – Outline for information sessions for potential participants

Session Outline
1. Who I am and what the research is about
2. Who I am looking to involve
3. Participants invited to share: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why you are interested in learning to sew clothes?• Why now?• What you would most like to be able to make?
4. How the research will work
5. What you will need in order to participate: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• basic sewing kit (provided by the project)• access to a working domestic sewing machine (may be loaned by the project).• a smartphone• an iron
6. What you will get in return – introductory workshop/support to get started
7. Opportunity to ask questions
8. What to do next if you still want to be involved

Appendix 6a – Introductory guide to sewing resources

Where to start:

Sewing Resources

The resurgence of interest in home sewing means loads of advice and information is available on- and offline. The tricky bit is finding what works for you. Here is a brief guide to get you started.

Patterns for Beginners

There are two types of sewing patterns out there – those produced by established brands (often referred to online as ‘the big four’) that you would traditionally find in a high street haberdashery or fabric shop and a newer generation of indie patterns that are mostly sold online.

The ‘big four’:

All these pattern companies have pattern ranges identified as easy (see in brackets).

- Vogue (Very Easy Vogue)
- McCall (Easy)
- Butterick (Fast & Easy)
- Simplicity (Easy to Sew) – also New Look and [Burda](#) offering Easy and Super Easy patterns.

There are loads of places to search for these patterns online. Different sites offer different search options to help you narrow things down (eg. by difficulty, garment type, size range, fabric type) – you could try these: [sewdirect.com](#); [thefoldline.com](#); [jaycotts.co.uk](#).

Indie patterns:

There are at least a couple of hundred small independent companies producing contemporary patterns and this is growing all the time. Most of these companies sell their patterns as pdf downloads. Some, but not all, also produce them as full-scale pre-printed patterns. Most include some beginners’ patterns. If you search around, many also offer one or more free pattern downloads (usually in exchange for you signing up to a mailing list). These indie pattern companies/designers also offer a variety of online content, including blogs, tutorials or sew-alongs providing additional support and information. The Fold Line shop ([thefoldline.com](#)) is a good place to browse for pattern brands and find what you like before checking out individual websites. The Fold Line also offer a pattern printing service if you want pdf patterns printed out on a single sheet rather than having to piece them together from A4 pages printed at home.

Choosing a pattern:

Paper patterns provide you with a full-scale template for your garment and instructions for cutting out and making it. Most patterns are multi-sized and give a guide to the body measurements relating to each size. If your body measurements straddle sizes it’s usually best to start with the larger size. A good pattern will give you a guide to the type of fabric is designed for and the amount of fabric you will need. If you are starting from scratch it’s a good idea to select an easy or beginners’ pattern. These tend to be for looser fit garments without too many details or fastenings. Some brands are better than others at designing patterns that work for [larger sizes](#). Like all things home sewing, patterns are heavily skewed towards women and women’s clothes. Men’s patterns are harder to find but [Burda](#), [Simplicity](#), [Thread Theory](#) and [Wardrobe by Me](#) all do patterns for men’s clothes.

Books for Beginners

As well as patterns there are also lots of books designed for people learning to sew. Some provide comprehensive guides to sewing skills and techniques, while others focus around a series of projects with the necessary paper patterns included. There are also some books that focus on making your own simple patterns for garments from scratch or adapting basic patterns for different styles. Here are a few to give you an idea of what is available:

General

[The Sewing Book](#) by Alison Smith MBE – over 300 step-by-step techniques.

[Complete Guide to Dressmaking](#) by Jules Fallon – essential techniques and skills

[Sewing Machine Basics](#) by Jane Bolsover – step-by-step guide for beginners.

[Merchant & Mills Sewing Book](#) – some more gender-neutral sewing/tailoring advice.

Project based

[Love at First Stitch: Demystifying Dressmaking](#) by Tilly Walnes – beginners' projects from former Sewing Bee contestant and indie pattern designer popular with beginners.

[The Beginners Guide to Dressmaking](#) by Wendy Ward – sewing techniques and patterns to make some simple classic items.

[Sewing Basics for Every Body](#) by Wendy Ward – based around 5 gender-neutral garment styles.

[The Great British Sewing Bee: Sustainable Style](#) by Caroline Akselson & Alexandra Bruce – sewing projects for adults at all levels.

[Breaking the Pattern: A modern way to sew](#) by Saara and Laura Huhta – instructions and patterns for 10 garments designed by the Scandinavian indie pattern company Named.

Using self-drafted patterns

[No Patterns Needed: DIY Couture from Simple Shapes](#) by Rosie Martin – step-by-step instructions for making garments based on simple shapes rather than pre-printed patterns.

[Freehand Fashion: Learning to sew the perfect wardrobe – no patterns required!](#) by Chinelo Bally – projects based on freehand methods for making by transferring measurements direct to fabric.

[Pattern Making Templates for Skirts & Dresses](#) by Alice Prier and Lilia Tisdall of Alice & Co. Patterns – aims to demystify the pattern making process using some basic templates.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. If you are looking for a book that includes basic patterns, shop around to find one that includes beginner-level projects and is closest to the style of clothes you want to wear.

If you are looking for more of a sewing manual you can often pick these up cheaply second-hand in charity shops. All the big sewing brands (Vogue, McCalls, Singer etc.) produced these at one time. They may look a bit dated but a lot of the information is still sound and they can be useful for picking up tips and techniques.

Books aimed specifically at men who sew, especially ones aimed at beginners, are harder to find. As Western men's clothes tend to be more structured and involve more fastenings (button and zips) than basic women's garments, they can be more complex for beginners to get started on. Here's a Threads Magazine review of books about [sewing for men](#).

Social Media

There is loads of sewing related content online. There are home sewers, makers, bloggers and pattern designs from all over the world posting content to YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. Again, the trick is to find what suits you.

YouTube Tutorials

YouTube videos can be really helpful for learning any practical skill. There's loads of content covering specific projects or individual skills and techniques. Not all the advice is good and a lot of sewing videos seem to come from America, where they use inches rather than centimetres and have slightly different terminology for some sewing related equipment and techniques, which can be a bit confusing for a beginner but it's worth searching around for advice. Search anything you are stuck on and you'll likely find someone has made a video about it!

Facebook Groups

There are lots of Facebook groups where people share what they are making, review patterns and ask for advice. In general, the online sewing community is a supportive one. It can be helpful to see what patterns people are using, how easy they've found them and what fabric they've used for particular makes. These kinds of posts often also give information about common adjustments that people make to sewing patterns for a better fit.

Instagram

You'll find content here from all the indie pattern brands as well as other makers, designers, sewing bloggers and online fabric shops. There is also 'how to' video content on IGTV. The ability to search on hashtags to find content relating to specific sewing patterns can be useful here and on Facebook. The Great British Sewing Bee (@britishsewingbee) and many former contestants can be found on Instagram. The Fold Line (@thefoldline) are also here and on Facebook with pattern reviews and other useful content. McCalls (@mccallspatterncompany) can be useful for browsing patterns. Here too, there's a lot less content aimed at men but @sewing_for_boys or @rifallo (former Sewing Bee contestant Riccardo Guido) might give you somewhere to start.

Elsewhere Online

There is no shortage of other online content - blogs, websites, podcasts and the rest - aimed at home sewers with different interests, be that sustainable fashion, specific size/fit issues, vintage style and so on.

Sewing Magazines

There are lots of sewing magazines out there covering sewing crafts of all kinds. Some of the older dressmaking ones are more aimed at practised enthusiasts than sewing beginners and have a tendency to emphasise a lot of the kit and equipment you can buy but don't necessarily need. Magazines often come with free patterns or pattern offers. Sometimes, the free offers squeeze multiple patterns onto a single sheet, which can make choosing the lines you need to work with a bit of a challenge. Here are a few examples of magazines that include some beginners' content:

[Love Sewing](#) – includes some free and downloadable patterns.

[Threads](#) – includes 'projects & patterns' and 'how-to' sections.

[The Pattern Pages](#) – includes pattern reviews and a 'learn to sew' section.

[Fibre Mood](#) – includes beginners' advice and searchable patterns which look to be good value.

Appendix 6b – Introductory guide to sewing

Where to start:

Sewing Basics

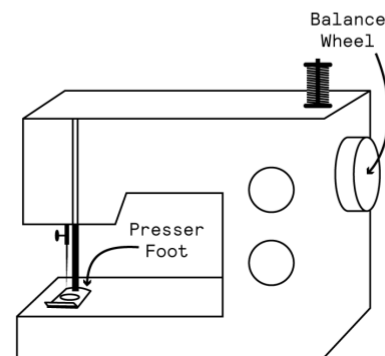
As with most craft skills, sewing can only really be learnt by doing it. There is loads of advice online if you are happy to search for it there, but as a beginner, you may not always know what you are looking for. Here is some basic information and a few tips to help you get started.

The Sewing Machine

This is a super basic guide, so if you are new to using a sewing machine you will hopefully have a manual to show you how to thread and operate it. Threading is fairly similar on most domestic machines, so if you don't have a manual try searching online to find a demo on one that looks similar. If you are completely new to sewing you might want to practice sewing straight on scraps of fabric first.

Balance wheel – This is on the right side of the machine and is used to raise and lower the machine needle manually. This is done by turning the wheel anti-clockwise (i.e. always towards you). You will need the needle to be at its highest point when you are removing your sewing from the machine or when changing the bobbin or machine needle.

Presser foot – This holds the fabric in place and allows it to move through the machine as you sew. You'll need to lower the presser foot before you start sewing and raise it when you are ready to remove your fabric.



Other dials and controls – On a non-digital machine you will have various dials for stitch selection, stitch length, stitch width (e.g. for zigzag and buttonhole stitches), upper thread tension and foot pressure. A digital machine will also have options for changing these things and it is worth checking your manual to understand what each does and when to adjust it. Most machines also have a reverse button or lever, which helps you to sew back and forth to secure the beginnings and ends of seams.

Sewing Patterns

Paper patterns provide a full-scale template for all the pieces you will need to cut from your fabric to make a garment. They usually indicate the amount and type of fabric you will need plus any trims, fixings or other items required. Here are a few choices you will need to make about your pattern:

Size - Most patterns are multi-size, so you will need to decide which outline is right for you. The pattern should give measurements for each size. It's best to use these, rather than the clothing sizes, to judge which size to work with. If your measurements straddle two sizes it is usually best to go for the larger one as it is easier to take a garment in than to let it out.

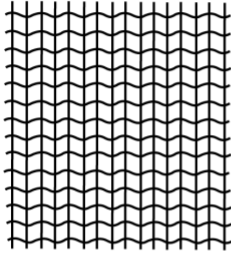
Cut or trace - Once you've decided which outline you are working with you can either cut out the pattern to your chosen size or trace off the outlines (and other information) for your size and leave the original pattern intact to use again in any size.

Pre- or home print – Many contemporary patterns come as PDF downloads. These can be printed out on A4 sheets and stuck together before you cut or trace as above. Or you can use a pattern printing service like www.savvysewist.co.uk to get the pattern printed on a single sheet.

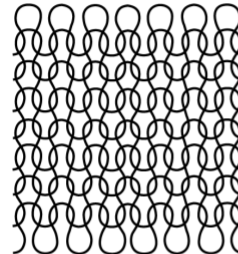
Most pattern instructions will show you how to lay your pattern pieces out on your fabric. Each pattern piece will give you information about how to cut it and align it to other pieces.

Choosing Fabric

The huge variety of different types of fabric can make choosing fabric tricky for a beginner, especially when buying online. A good pattern will tell you the types of fabric it is designed for. In general, fabrics have either a woven or a knit structure and its useful to know the difference:



WOVEN fabrics have threads running in two directions and are non-stretch along these lines (unless they have added elastane). Woven fabrics will fray along their cut edges.



KNIT fabrics have threads looped together in chains. They will stretch in one, two or four directions and are less prone to fraying than woven fabrics.

Different sewing machine needles and stitches are used for woven and knit fabrics. Standard (sharp) needles are used for woven fabrics and stretch or ballpoint needles are used for knit fabrics. These stretch needles have blunter tips that allow them to pass between threads without splitting them. When sewing stretch fabrics you will also need to use a stretch stitch (e.g. zigzag).

Fabrics also come in different weights - the lighter weight the fabric the finer the machine needle you will need. Light weight, flowy fabrics can be tricky to handle, as can sewing through multiple layers of heavier fabrics like denim. Mid-weight, non-stretch fabrics are easiest for beginners, although some beginner patterns will use stretch fabrics. Fabrics with bold or directional prints (like checks or stripes) or a 'nap' (like corduroy or velvet) need additional consideration before cutting, to match patterns or orientate the fabric the right way up. Plain, non-textured fabrics and multi-directional prints are easier to start with.

Buying Fabric

Buying fabric in a 'real life' shop where you can feel the fabric's weight and texture, see the colours accurately and ask questions of staff can be really helpful for a beginner. Where this is not an option there are lots of online fabric stores. Some online stores are more searchable than others. Many offer low cost sample services if you want to try before you buy. Some specialise in 'roll end' or 'dead stock' from clothes manufacturers which can be a good way to get quality fabrics at a lower cost and help reduce environmental impact. Online sewing groups can also be a good place to pick up fabric buying tips. If you don't want to always buy new, decent fabric pieces often turn up in charity shops. If you are concerned about cutting into new fabric, then using old sheets or duvet covers to practice on can be a good way to gain confidence.

Preparing & Cutting Fabric

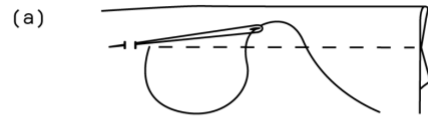
Many fabrics shrink when washed, so it's a good idea to wash your fabric before cutting out the pieces for your garment. Shrinkage is more of an issue for natural fibres, like cotton and linen than for synthetics, like polyester. If you ever work with woollen fabrics these will need treating like any wool items in your wardrobe, which may only be suitable for dry cleaning. Similarly, you will need to set the iron according to the fabric type (i.e. hotter for cottons and linens than for synthetics). If you are not sure exactly what kind of fabric you are working with wash and/or iron a test piece first.

Most fabrics have a 'right' side and a 'wrong' side. Sometimes the right side is obvious because it's where the print is boldest or, like denim, it's where the dyed threads are uppermost. On other fabrics, it can be harder to tell but you need to decide which is the right side before you cut out your garment pieces. The other thing you will need to be aware of is the 'grainline' of the fabric. This relates to the direction of the threads within the fabric and is parallel to the 'selvedge', which is the sealed edge down each side of a fabric created when it is manufactured. All pattern pieces will indicate their orientation to the grainline. Cutting fabric requires sharp tools. Some sewers find rotary cutters and a cutting mat easier than scissors but either will work provided they are sharp.

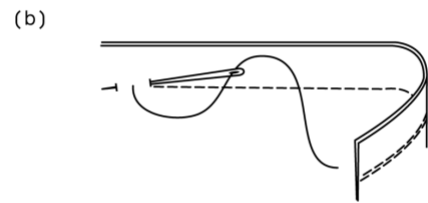
Hand Sewing

Hand sewing is a useful skill even if you have a sewing machine. Here are four stitches that it's really useful to know:

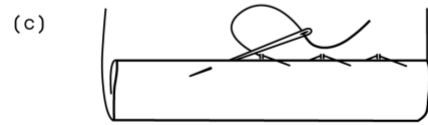
Running stitch (a) – Used for tacking and finishing raw edges. Weave your needle in and out of the fabric and pull the thread through behind it. Vary stitch length depending on the purpose.



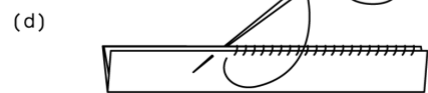
Backstitch (b) – Used for most seams. Pass the needle in and out of the fabric one stitch at a time. When all the thread is pulled through to the top side, take the needle back to the end of the last visible stitch and make a new stitch passing under where the thread comes out. On the top side, you will see a continuous line of stitching. Underneath the stitches will overlap.



Hemming stitch (c) – Used to hem with minimal stitches showing on the outside. Pass your needle through the turned-up edge of your hem from back to front. Move on about 1cm and pick up a couple of threads from the reverse side of the piece you are hemming. Move on 1cm and repeat.



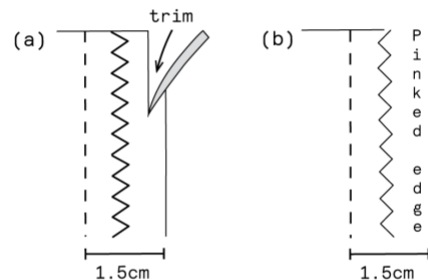
Overhand stitch (d) – A good way to bring folded edges together. Work close to the edge making small stitches that pass through both folded edges.



Seam Allowance & Seam Finishing

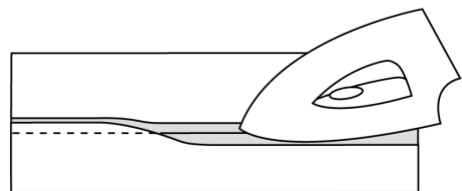
Seam allowance is the distance between the raw edge of the fabric and the stitch line on each piece of a garment. It is usually 1 or 1.5cm and will be indicated on pattern instructions. When sewing two pieces of fabric together it is usual to have the right sides (e.g. the patterned sides) facing each other, so that once the seam is sewn all the raw edges are on the inside of the garment (although there are some exceptions to this). Once you've aligned your two pieces it helps to pin them in place before sewing your seam.

It is a good idea to finish the raw edges of the seam allowance once your seams are sewn. Finishing stops the fabric edges from fraying, making your garment more durable and neater on the inside. The most common way to do this, if you don't have an overlocker (which most beginners don't), is to zigzag stitching and trimming the seam allowances (a) or using pinking shears (special zigzag scissors) to trim seam allowances (b).



Pressing & Ironing

Ironing and pressing are an essential part of sewing. It's also good to iron your fabric before you start and to press newly stitched seams after they have been sewn so that they lie flat. To press a simple seam you would usually press the seam allowances open on the reverse side.



Appendix 7a – Guide for making journal entries

KEEPING YOUR SEWING JOURNAL

Why am I being asked to keep a journal?

You are being asked to capture details about your sewing activities so that I can gain an understanding of your experience of learning to sew. Journal entries will be used as a starting point for the discussions we have in subsequent interviews. Capturing details of your sewing activities in your journal will give you a chance to reflect on them as you go along and help you remember what you have done in the weeks preceding the interview. Sharing your journal with me will mean our next conversation can be one that responds to your personal experience of learning to sew. I am interested in how you approach your sewing activity and how you feel about it. I am particularly interested in the bits that you find challenging and the way you work things out.

What am I being asked to capture in my journal?

For your first sewing activity I would like you to focus on the following things in each journal entry:

1. What you are doing.
2. How you are approaching it.
3. How it is going.
4. How you feel about the outcome.
5. What you plan to do next.

Ideally it would be good if you could capture this information each time you do some sewing or on a roughly weekly basis.

Guide for journal writing?

Attached is an example of a journal entry I wrote about something I was doing recently. Don't worry about the specific activity here, the example is just to give you an idea of the type of content and level of detail you might include - but there is no set format for this.

I have written this journal entry by hand but you might want to write your digitally or in the style of a blog with photos. Any format that can be easily shared with me is fine. I can provide notebooks if needed. Paper journals can be shared by photographing the pages and sending via WhatsApp. Digital formats can be shared via email.

In the sample journal entry I have recorded some 'how to' notes and a drawing. I have also stuck in a little paper test piece I made while trying to remind myself how something worked. This 'sketchbook' style might not be how you work. It is fine if your diary just contains words. It doesn't matter how it looks so long as it is legible and captures details of the sewing you have done and how it has gone. Your journal might be neater than mine (or not)! If you share your journal entries as you go along I can see where you have got to and offer support. The activity I wrote about went well but that might not always be the case – it's good if you can record the things that don't work as well as those that do.

What will happen to my journal?

All visual and textual data, including any work in progress images and journal entries, will be analysed to inform research between interviews and subsequently. Diary pages, quotes and images may be used in future research outputs (e.g. publications, presentations, online resources or teaching materials) but will be anonymised according to the choice you indicated on the consent form. If you have shared images of your journal pages as photos, the journal itself may be scanned at the end of the project before being returned to you.

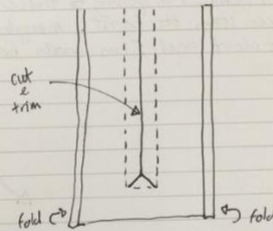
Friday 12th Feb 2021

What am I doing?

Trying to add a placetext to a pair of trousers based on a pattern from a 1967 book by Elizabeth Craig.

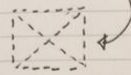
How am I approaching it?

I've rewatched a video (Professor Pinchiston) to remind myself what order to do things in. She includes calculation for the placetext piece which is $5 \times \text{finished placetext width} + 1 \text{cm}$.



- ① One piece with interfacing
- ② Sew to reverse.
- ③ Snip and trim
- ④ Turn out & edges
- ⑤ Bring through to front side fold & stitch
- ⑥ At bottom, trim underlayers & stitch

It feels a bit confusing so I've tried to work it out on paper before doing it for real.



How did it go?

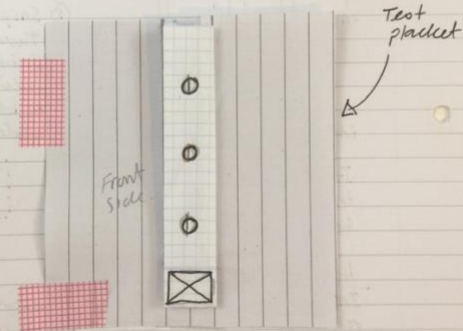
Inserting the placetext into the trousers worked really well. I had to look back at the video to make sure I was working on the correct side of the fabric. I also had to guess a bit how much of the material to trim away at the bottom of the placetext but it has gone in well and given me the right sized opening at the side of the trousers.

How do you feel about the end result?

I'm surprised how quickly the came together - having the instructions fresh in my mind rather than muddling through - it all fell into place quite accurately. Planned that I checked!

What next?

I now need to put some darts in the waist of the trousers. The pattern was drafted in inches (1967!) and waist is $3\frac{1}{2}$ ins which I need to get down to 31 ins - so reduce by about 17cm. I'm going to take more out at the back than the front - maybe 3cm each front dart and 5cm each back one.



Appendix 7b – Guide for making video clips

CAPTURING YOUR EXPERIENCE ON VIDEO

Why am I being asked to film?

You are being asked to capture elements of your making experience on video so that I can see aspects of that process in action without being there at the time. The films will be used as prompts in subsequent interviews when we will talk about what you have made and your experience of learning to sew. We will watch your film clips together during these online interviews and you will be asked to talk about what is shown in the film. I am interested in how you approach your sewing activity and how you feel about it. I am particularly interested in the material and sensory aspects of making, how you are engaging with tools and materials and what you are doing with your hands.

What am I being asked to film?

For your first sewing activity I would like you to make THREE short (max 5 minute) videos focusing on different stages of the making process:

1. cutting out
2. construction
3. finishing

Here is a short guide to help you make videos that best capture your experience of learning to sew.

Guide to filming your sewing activities:

The aim of your videos is to show your making process as naturally as possible so that we can talk about the experience afterwards. It might be best to do your filming once you have already started on the sewing activities you are planning to do that day so you are already in the flow of it when you film. Choose a time to break off and start filming, perhaps when you are doing something new for the first time or when you are finding something particularly daunting, tricky or enjoyable to do.

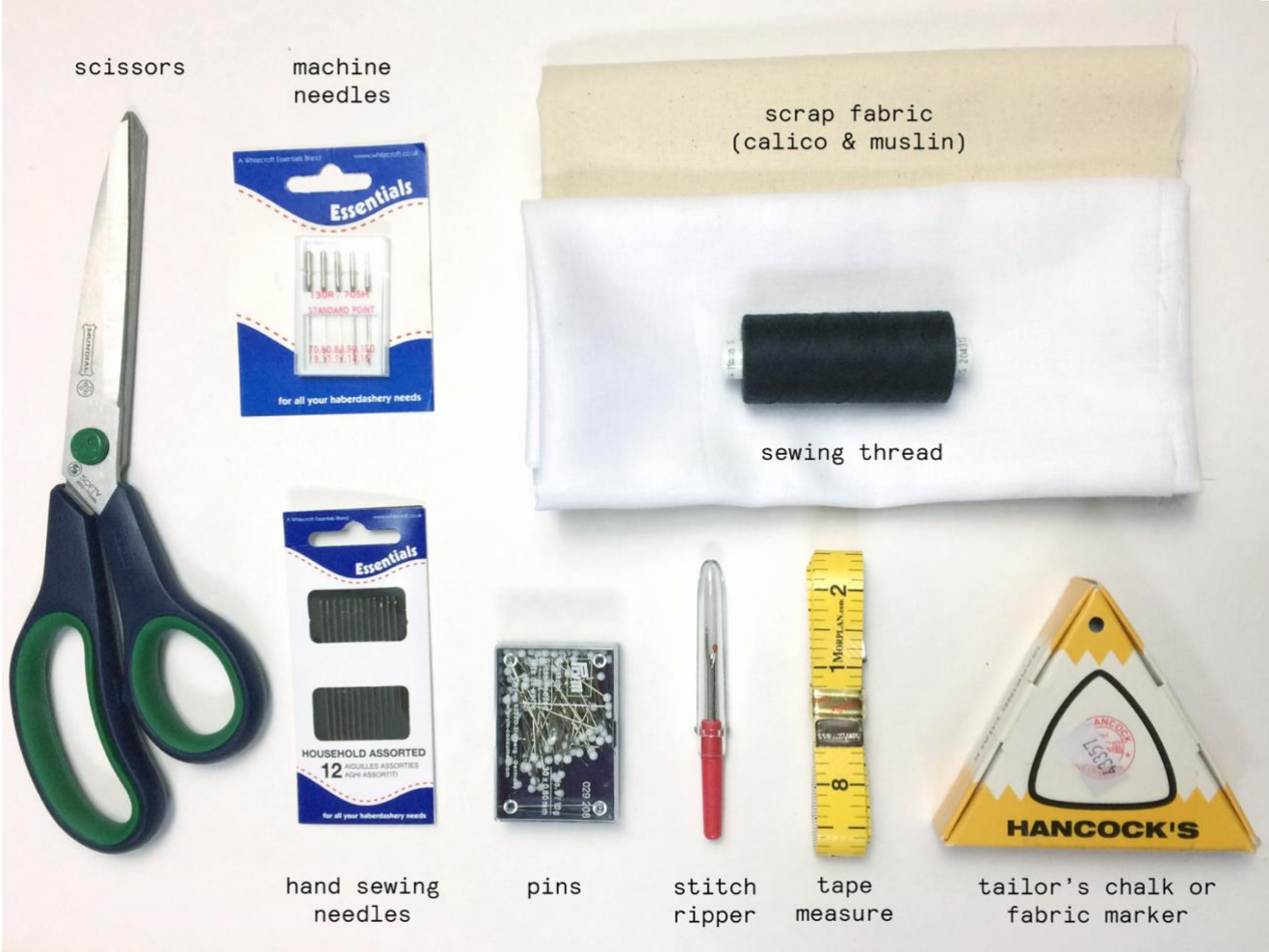
- **Workspace** – your workspace should be as it is normally is when you sew, just make sure there's nothing in shot that you don't want people to see.
- **Framing** – think about what you are trying to record. Do you need to show the whole workspace or are you focusing more close up on something you are doing with your hands?
- **Camera position** – Position the phone for landscape view and work out where it needs to be to film. Clamp or prop the phone in position or get someone else to hold it for you.
- **Lighting** – try to light the area you want to capture as well as you can. It helps to have multiple light sources from different angles to avoid hard shadows.
- **Tools and materials** – make sure the tools and materials you are working with are to hand before you start filming.
- **ACTION!** – the aim is to capture work in progress as it happens. You don't need to perform or speak while you do it but if you do think out loud while you are filming that's fine.

Once you've made a video clip you can share it with me via WhatsApp or if the file is too big to send that way you can use [NTU ZendTo](#) (works like Dropbox or WeTransfer but is encrypted) to drop it off. If you do this as you make your clips I can keep up with your learning and look at your clips before we next meet.

What will happen to my video clips once we have discussed them?

Your video clips will be saved securely. Stills or moving images from these clips may be used in future research outputs. They will be anonymised or credited to you according to the preference you expressed on your image release form. If you have chosen to remain anonymous, any clips where you are identifiable will not be used outside of our interviews.

Appendix 8 – Sewing kit – prompt used in introductory workshops



Appendix 9 – Phase III follow-up interview schedule

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW: Learning to Sew Clothes for Yourself
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview.• The interview will take between 30-45 minutes.• Can you confirm that you are happy for this interview to be recorded?• Do you have any other questions before we start? <p><i>[This is a topic guide only. The precise questions and prompts under each of the four headings will be tailored for individual participants, based on thoughts and experiences shared earlier in this research]</i></p>
Recent experience of sewing/learning to sew
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ask about recent sewing activity (since last engagement with the project).<ul style="list-style-type: none">- new items made- work in progress- sewing activities planned but not yet started- other use made of sewing skills (e.g. mending/altering)- reasons for not sewing
<ol style="list-style-type: none">2. Ask about new sewing skills and/or approaches to learning sewing skills (since last engagement with the project).<ul style="list-style-type: none">- at home- online- outside the home (e.g. in person workshop/courses)- with friends & family- other
Understanding sewing and clothes
<ol style="list-style-type: none">3. Ask about the resources they have found most useful in learning to sew and anything they think would make these skills easier to learn.

4. Ask about anything they feel they have learnt about clothes from trying to make them.

- style
- fit
- fabric
- construction
- preferences
- value

Impact of learning clothes sewing skills

5. Ask about any impact that the experience of learning to sew clothes has had on the way they view, use or purchase clothes.

- in the wardrobe
- on the body (self/others)
- in the shops
- online

6. Ask about anything else they feel they have learnt from trying to make their own clothes.

- practical
- personal
- physical
- social
- material

Reflections and future sewing plans

7. Ask about the most satisfying and most challenging aspects of learning to sew clothes.

8. Ask about any future sewing plans.

- making
- learning
- sharing

Closing the interview

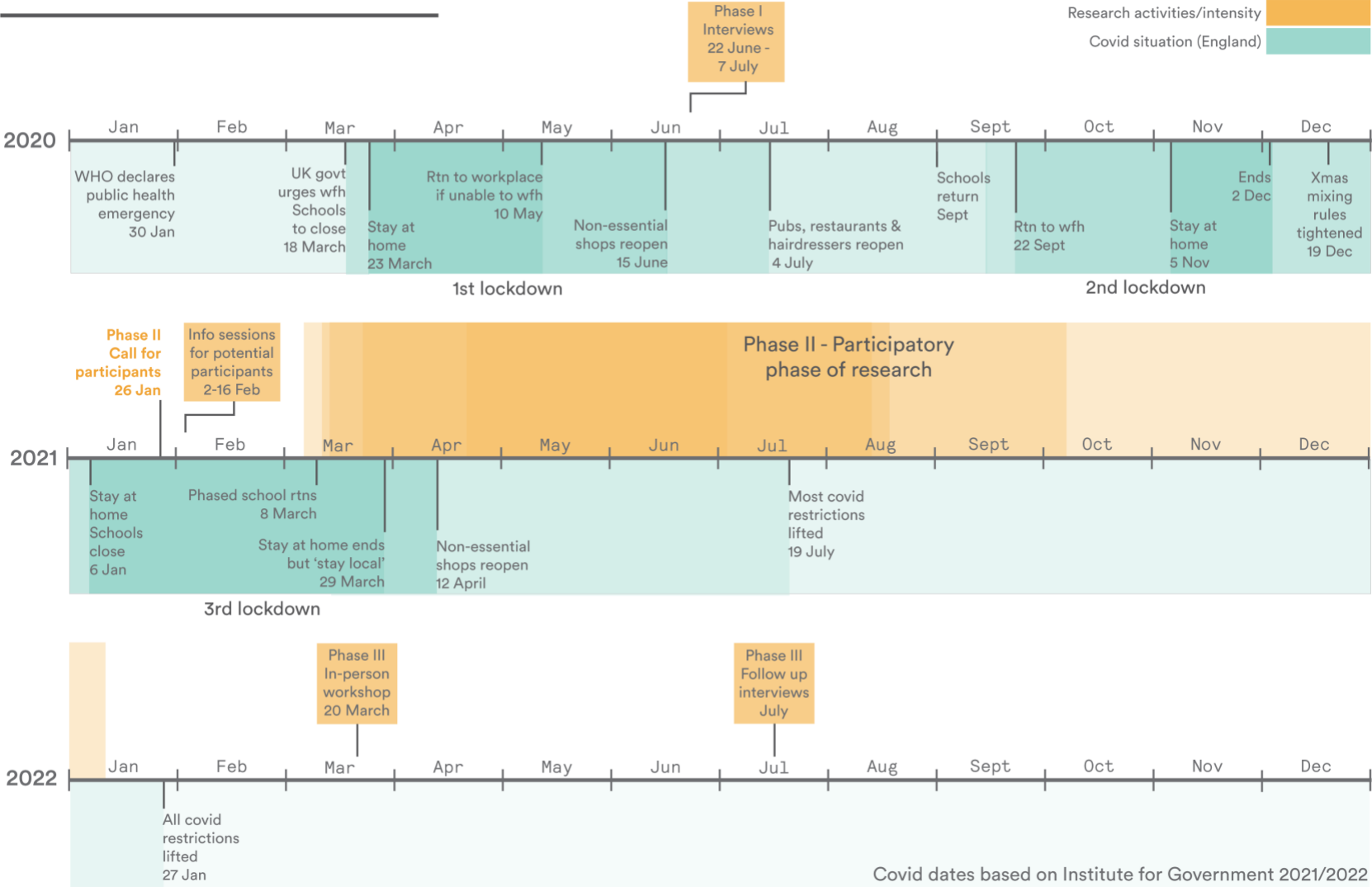
Thank you for responding to all my questions and for everything you have shared during the course of this project.

Is there anything else you feel you would like to add?

Thanks again for your time.

Appendix 10 – Research timeline (showing UK Covid 19 restrictions)

Research/Covid Timeline 2020-2022



Appendix 11 – Phase I data coding

Context & Prior Experience	Limitations & Impacts
Experience of homemade clothes	Consumption
Friends who sew	Expense
Other creative pursuits	Space
Other textile crafts	Time
Prior expectations of sewing	Waste
Prior experience of sewing	Motivations & Rewards
Sewing at school	Being able to make
Sewing in the home	Clothes that fit
Fabric	Hobby or having a project
Buying fabric online	Individuality or Uniqueness
Fabric choice	Interest in fashion & clothes
Fabric shops	Learning a skill
Fabric sourcing	Making for others
Fabric understanding	Provenance
Feelings about sewing	Reaction of others
Annoyance	Sustainability & Ethics
Confidence	Offline - advice, information, inspiration
Daunted or intimidated	Advice IRL
Disappointment	Attending classes
Forgiveness	Magazines
Frustration	Sewing Bee
Guilt	Sewing books
Happiness & Enjoyment	Online - advice, information, inspiration
Mental wellbeing	Direct contact e.g. DM
Patience	Online influence & inspiration
Perfectionism	Online resources
Pride	Research before making
Satisfaction	Sewalong (videos & blogs)
Learning process	Social media (Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest)
Accuracy in cutting & measuring	YouTube
Beginners projects	Patterns and instructions
Copying from existing garments	Big four commercial patterns
Fit issues & fitting	Indie patterns
Future plans & aspirations	Men's patterns
Getting started	Pattern instructions
More advanced makes	PDF patterns
Pattern alteration & adaptation	TATB – Tilly & the Buttons
Pattern tracing	Ungrouped stand-alone codes
Repurposing, hacking and altering	Covid-19 & Lockdown
Seam allowance & finishing	Equipment
Toiles & test garments	Men sewing
Trial & error	Ready to wear
Wearability & Quality	Style
Working with machines	

Appendix 12 – Phase I participant information sheet and consent form

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET: Learning to Sew Clothes for Yourself

What is this project about?

Learning to Sew Clothes for Yourself is the first phase of a larger collaborative design project looking at how people learn basic sewing skills for the home construction of clothing. The context for the project is clothing sustainability. The project will explore the tools and resources that help people develop and apply sewing skills for a more sustainable future.

Who is running this project?

Sally Cooke, an Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded Doctoral/PhD Student in the School of Art & Design, Nottingham Trent University (NTU).

What will it involve?

You will be asked to participate in an interview of between 30-60 minutes, either online or over the phone, depending on your preference. The interview will consist of a number of open questions for you to respond to. During the interview you will be asked to describe your experience of learning to sew clothes, including showing one or more of the early garments you made. You may be asked to share photographs of any items discussed via email after the interview. If you wish to give a question more consideration or expand on any answers you have given following the interview you will have the opportunity to follow up in writing.

Why have I been chosen to take part?

The aim is to interview a diverse range of participants with different backgrounds and experiences of learning to sew. You have indicated that you would be willing to take part in this study and have been selected on the basis of creating a mixed group of interviewees overall.

What data will you collect from me?

The interviews will be audio recorded. You may, at your discretion, also share photographs of items you have made or add to your responses in writing subsequently.

What will happen to the data you gather?

The audio recording of the interview will be anonymised and transcribed into text form before the audio files are deleted. Any written responses following the interview will be similarly anonymised. Text files will be analysed to identify key themes and quotes from the interview data. Quotes may be used in future research outputs (e.g. publications, presentations, online resources or teaching materials) but will be anonymised and not attributable to any identifiable individual. Any photographs you share of items you have made may be used in future research outputs to illustrate points discussed in the interview, but only where no individual is personally identifiable in the image.

How will you protect my confidentiality and anonymity?

All of the raw data and any personal information you provide will be kept confidential and in a secure place. Interview transcripts and data analysis files will be fully anonymised so that you are not personally identifiable within the data. Where this anonymised data is subsequently used in the form of quotes, a pseudonym will be used so that you are not identifiable. In line with research best practice and NTU's Research Data Management Policy, the fully anonymised data from this study may be made available to those conducting subsequent studies in a form where no individual is identifiable. Any images you share of items you have made may be reproduced in materials published from this research. No image in which you are personally identifiable will be used or shared under any circumstances.

What happens if I want to withdraw?

You are welcome to withdraw from the interview at any time, and do not need to give an explanation. You may choose to withdraw from the research up to one month after the interview. While your contribution will remain in the raw data, it will be anonymised and your comments and any images you have shared will not be quoted or used in any outputs.

How can I find out more about the project and its results?

Lead researcher: Sally Cooke, School of Art & Design, NTU, sally.cooke2019@my.ntu.ac.uk | **Director of Studies:** Dr Amy Twigger Holroyd, School of Art & Design, NTU, amy-twigger.holroyd@ntu.ac.uk or 0115 848 8249 | **Chair of the College of Art, Architecture Design and Humanities (CAADH) Research Ethics Committee, NTU:** Professor Michael White, michael.white@ntu.ac.uk or 0115 848 2069

CONSENT FORM: Learning to Sew Clothes for Yourself

Please read and confirm your consent to participating in this project by placing an 'X' in the appropriate boxes and signing and dating this form.

1. I have read the project description and had the opportunity to ask questions about the project and these have been answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw by informing the researcher of this decision up to one month after the interview without giving any reason and without any negative implications.
3. I give permission for the interview to be audio recorded.
4. I understand that the recording will be treated confidentially, anonymised and transcribed into text before being destroyed securely.
5. I understand that quotations from the interview or responses given in writing, which will be made anonymous, may be included in material published from this research.
6. I understand that any photographs I share of items that I have made may be included in material published from this research, but only where no individual is personally identifiable in the image.
7. I understand that the anonymised data from this study may be used by those conducting subsequent studies but only in its anonymised form in which I am not identifiable.
8. I am willing to participate in an interview as part of this research project.

Participant's name

Date

Signature

Researcher's name

Date

Signature

Lead researcher: Sally Cooke, School of Art & Design, NTU, sally.cooke2019@my.ntu.ac.uk | **Director of Studies:** Dr Amy Twigger Holroyd, School of Art & Design, NTU, amy-twigger.holroyd@ntu.ac.uk or 0115 848 8249 | **Chair of the College of Art, Architecture Design and Humanities (CAADH) Research Ethics Committee, NTU:** Professor Michael White, michael.white@ntu.ac.uk or 0115 848 2069

Appendix 13 – Phase II participant information sheet and consent form

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET: Learning to Sew Clothes for Yourself

What is this project about?

Learning to Sew Clothes for Yourself is a participatory design project looking at how people learn basic sewing skills for the home construction of clothing. The context for the project is clothing sustainability. The project will explore tools and resources that help people develop and apply sewing skills for a more sustainable future.

Who is running this project?

Sally Cooke, an Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded Doctoral/PhD Student in the School of Art & Design, Nottingham Trent University (NTU).

What will it involve?

An initial online workshop will introduce you to the sewing machine and resources aimed at sewing beginners. Following this you will be asked to try out some agreed home sewing activities including (or related to) making clothes. These activities will be interspersed by a series of three online interviews, over a 4-6 month period. During your making activities you will be asked to video aspects of your learning experience on your phone and to capture your reflections on the experience in a paper or digital journal. These will be used to prompt discussion at the subsequent elicitation interview and will inform future making activities. You may choose to share work in progress with other participants and/or the researcher via WhatsApp between interviews. The research will take place over a 4-6 month period depending on your availability. Time commitment may vary but it is estimated that 2-3 hours a week would be the maximum required. It will be up to you how much sewing you do between interviews. Covid-19 restrictions permitting a face-to-face group workshop may be an option towards the end of the project.

Why have I been chosen to take part and will I need any equipment to participate ?

Following an introduction to the project you expressed an interest in taking part. You have been selected on the basis that you are a beginner to clothes making and would like to learn to sew your own clothes. Basic sewing equipment, including a sewing machine, will be necessary for participation and may be loaned to you if required.

What data will you collect from me?

The initial workshop and subsequent interviews will be video recorded. Video footage and journal content provided by you during the course of the project will be collected along with any photographs and thoughts on your making activities that you have chosen to share.

What will happen to the data you gather?

Workshop and interview videos will be stored securely, transcribed and anonymised according to your preference before recordings are deleted. Work in progress videos, images and journal entries provided by you will also be anonymised or not as you prefer. Journal entries on paper will be scanned before being returned to you. All visual and textual data will be analysed to inform research between interviews and subsequently. Quotes, images and video content may be used in future research outputs (e.g. publications, presentations, online resources or teaching materials) but will be anonymised according to the choice you indicate on the consent form.

How will you protect my confidentiality and anonymity?

All of the raw data and any personal information from this project will be kept confidential and in a secure place. You can choose to be identified or anonymised in the raw data and the outputs from this research. You can also choose whether any visual materials, photos or videos created by you during the study are anonymous or credited to you by name. If you choose to be anonymous a pseudonym may be used. If you choose to share work in progress with other participants in the project your phone number will be visible to them but will not be used or shared outside of this project. In line with research best practice and NTU's Research Data Management Policy, data from this study may be retained and made available to those conducting related research. You can choose whether your data is retained for this purpose and whether in anonymised or identifiable form.

What happens if I want to withdraw?

You can withdraw from this study at any time up to one month after completion. You do not need to give an explanation and will only need to return any equipment loaned to you for the purpose of participation. While your contribution will remain in the raw data, it will be anonymised and will not be quoted or used in any outputs.

How can I find out more about the project and its results?

Lead researcher: Sally Cooke, School of Art & Design, NTU, sally.cooke2019@my.ntu.ac.uk | **Director of Studies:** Dr Amy Twigger Holroyd, School of Art & Design, NTU, amy-twigger.holroyd@ntu.ac.uk or 0115 848 8249 | **Chair of the College of Art, Architecture Design and Humanities (CAADH) Research Ethics Committee, NTU:** Professor Michael White, michael.white@ntu.ac.uk or 0115 848 2069

CONSENT FORM: Learning to Sew Clothes for Yourself

Please read and confirm your consent to participating in this project by placing an 'X' in the appropriate boxes and signing and dating this form.

1. I confirm that the purpose of the project has been explained to me verbally and in writing. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time up to one month after completion without giving any reason and without any negative implications.
3. I give permission for the initial online workshop, any subsequent face-to-face workshop and all video elicitation interviews to be recorded.
4. I understand that these recordings will be treated confidentially and transcribed into text before being destroyed securely.
5. I understand that if I choose to join the project WhatsApp group this will be solely for the sharing of work in progress. My phone number will be visible to other participants but will not be used or shared outside the confines of this project without my consent.
6. I understand that data generated during this project (i.e. transcripts, journal content, work in progress videos and images) may be used in future research outputs (e.g. publications, presentations, online resources or teaching materials).
7. I wish my data to be anonymised. I understand that comments, quotes or journal content may be included in material published from this research but that I will not be identified.
OR
I waive my right to anonymity in relation to data generated as part of this study. I am happy to be identified by name where comments, quotes or diary content are used in research outputs.
8. I understand that the data from this study may be archived and may be used by those conducting subsequent studies. I wish my anonymisation preferences, as stated in question 7, to be maintained for the archived data.
OR
I understand that the data from this study may be archived and may be used by those conducting subsequent studies. Although I waived my right to anonymity for the purposes of this project in question 7, I wish my data to be anonymised before being archived.
9. I understand that any equipment loaned to me in connection with this research will need to be returned on completion of, or withdrawal from, the study.
10. I agree to take part in this project

Participant's name Date Signature

Researcher's name Date Signature

Lead researcher: Sally Cooke, School of Art & Design, NTU, sally.cooke2019@my.ntu.ac.uk | **Director of Studies:** Dr Amy Twigger Holroyd, School of Art & Design, NTU, amy-twigger.holroyd@ntu.ac.uk or 0115 848 8249 | **Chair of the College of Art, Architecture Design and Humanities (CAADH) Research Ethics Committee, NTU:** Professor Michael White, michael.white@ntu.ac.uk or 0115 848 206

IMAGE RELEASE FORM: Learning to Sew Clothes for Yourself

Please read and confirm your consent to supplying video footage and images for this project by placing an 'X' in the appropriate boxes and signing and dating this form.

1. I confirm that the purpose of the project has been explained to me verbally and in writing. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time up to one month after completion without giving any reason and without any negative implications.
3. I understand that video footage or images I supply may be used in subsequent research outputs (e.g. publications, presentations, online resources or teaching materials).
4. I wish my data to be anonymised. My name will not be included alongside any images or video footage I have supplied.
OR
I waive my right to anonymity and wish my name to be include alongside my video footage or images in the study.
5. I understand that data from this study may be archived and may be used by those conducting subsequent studies. I wish my anonymisation preferences, as stated in question 4, to be maintained for any archived images or video footage
OR
I understand that data from this study may be archived and may be used by those conducting subsequent studies. Although I waived my right to anonymity for the purposes of this project in question 4, I wish my images and video footage to be anonymised before being archived.
6. I give permission for my video footage and images to be used for this project.

Participant's name Date Signature

Researcher's name Date Signature

Lead researcher: Sally Cooke, School of Art & Design, NTU, sally.cooke2019@my.ntu.ac.uk | **Director of Studies:** Dr Amy Twigger Holroyd, School of Art & Design, NTU, amy-twigger.holroyd@ntu.ac.uk or 0115 848 8249 | **Chair of the College of Art, Architecture Design and Humanities (CAADH) Research Ethics Committee, NTU:** Professor Michael White, michael.white@ntu.ac.uk or 0115 848 2069

Appendix 14 – Phase III participant information sheet and consent form

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET: LSCY Group Workshop & Follow-up Interviews

What is the purpose of these research activities?

The workshop and follow-up interviews are part of the wider Learning to Sew Clothes for Yourself (LSCY) project in which you have already been involved.

- The **workshop** will provide a relaxed group setting for participants to share their recent experiences of learning to sew clothes and to talk about some of the themes emerging from the research. The practical sewing activity in the workshop will link to the sustainability context of the research.
- A follow-up **interview** will consist of a series of open questions focusing on your individual experiences of learning to sew, including whether and how you have used your sewing skills since your last engagement with the project, and any future sewing plans you may have.

Data recorded during the workshop and follow-up interviews will be used to enrich and refine the research findings from the earlier phases of the project.

Who is running the workshop and follow-up interviews?

Sally Cooke, an Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded Doctoral/PhD Student in the School of Art & Design, Nottingham Trent University (NTU).

What will be involved?

The **workshop** will be a one-off four-hour in-person session conducted in a workshop space in Leeds early in 2022. Working around a group table for most of the session, participants will be invited to:

- share and compare experiences of learning to sew clothes, including a 'show and tell' of some of the items they have made;
- take part in a creative activity using basic sewing skills and left over materials generated in the process of learning to sew; and
- talk about some of the themes emerging from the research.

All elements of the workshop will be optional on the day. How much you wish to share, make and talk will be up to you. Refreshments will be provided and travel expenses reimbursed.

You will be invited to take part in an online follow-up **interview** in the summer of 2022, 4-5 months after the workshop. Interviews will take 30-45 minutes and will consist of a number of open questions inviting you to reflect on your experience of learning to sew and any future sewing plans that you may have. You may be invited to share photographs or online links relating to items discussed in the interview afterwards.

Why have I been chosen to take part?

You have already participated in an earlier stage of this project. You have previously expressed interest in taking part in a group workshop and follow-up interview.

What data will you collect from me?

The **workshop** will be audio recorded. Photos may be taken of any garments you choose to share with the group and of sewing work in progress during the session. No photos in which you are personally identifiable will be taken without your explicit consent. The follow-up **interview** will be video and audio recorded. Any photographs or links you choose to share following this will be retained.

What will happen to the data you gather?

All data will be stored securely and anonymised or not according to the choice you indicate on the consent form below. Audio and video recordings will be deleted once they have been transcribed. All visual and written data will be analysed to inform the research. Quotes and images may be used in future research outputs (e.g. publications, presentations, online resources or teaching materials) but will be anonymised according to your stated preferences.

How will you protect my confidentiality and anonymity?

All of the raw data and any personal information from this project will be kept confidential in a secure place. You can choose to be identified or anonymous in the raw data and the outputs from this research. If you choose to be anonymous a pseudonym may be used. In line with research best practice and NTU's Research Data Management Policy, data from this study may be retained and made available to those conducting related research. You can choose whether your data is retained for this purpose and whether in anonymised or identifiable form.

What happens if I want to withdraw?

You can withdraw from this study at any time up to one month after completion. You do not need to give an explanation. While your contribution will remain in the raw data, it will be anonymised and will not be quoted or used in any outputs.

How can I find out more about the project and its results?

Lead researcher: Sally Cooke, School of Art & Design, NTU, sally.cooke2019@my.ntu.ac.uk | **Director of Studies:** Dr Amy Twigger Holroyd, School of Art & Design, NTU, amy-twigger.holroyd@ntu.ac.uk or 0115 848 8249 | If you want to speak with someone who is not directly involved in this research, or concerning your rights as a research participant, you can contact Professor Jake Kaner, **Associate Dean for Research, School of Art & Design**, NTU, at jake.kaner@ntu.ac.uk or on 0115 848 8131.

CONSENT & IMAGE RELEASE FORM: LSCY Group Workshop & Follow-up Interviews

You can take part in either or both of the research activities outlined above. Please indicate which you wish to take part in by placing an 'X' in the appropriate box/boxes:

Group workshop

Follow-up interview

Please read and confirm your consent relating to these activities by placing an 'X' in the appropriate boxes and signing and dating this form.

1. I confirm that the purpose of the group workshop and follow-up interview has been explained to me verbally and in writing. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation in either or both of these activities is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw by informing the researcher of this decision up to one month after afterwards without giving any reason and without any negative implications.
3. I give permission for the group workshop and/or follow-up interview to be recorded.
4. I understand that recordings will be treated confidentially and transcribed into text before the recordings themselves are destroyed securely.
5. I give permission for sewn items shared or made during the workshop to be photographed and for these photographs, and any I choose to share as part of a follow-up interview, to be kept and used in this research.
6. I understand that data generated during the group workshop and/or follow up interview (i.e. audio transcripts, photos) may be used in future research outputs (e.g. publications, presentations, online resources or teaching materials).
7. I wish my data to be anonymised. I understand that comments, quotes or images may be included in material published from this research but that I will not be identified.
OR
I waive my right to anonymity in relation to data generated as part of this study. I am happy to be identified by name where comments, quotes or images are used in research outputs.
8. I understand that the data from this study may be archived and may be used by those conducting subsequent studies. I wish my anonymisation preferences, as stated in question 6, to be maintained for the archived data.
OR
I understand that the data from this study may be archived and may be used by those conducting subsequent studies. Although I waived my right to anonymity for the purposes of this project in question 6, I wish my data to be anonymised before being archived.
9. I agree to take part in the research activity/activities indicated above.

Participant's name

Date

Signature

Researcher's name

Date

Signature

Lead researcher: Sally Cooke, School of Art & Design, NTU, sally.cooke2019@my.ntu.ac.uk | **Director of Studies:** Dr Amy Twigger Holroyd, School of Art & Design, NTU, amy-twigger.holroyd@ntu.ac.uk or 0115 848 8249 | If you want to speak with someone who is not directly involved in this research, or concerning your rights as a research participant, you can contact Professor Jake Kaner, **Associate Dean for Research, School of Art & Design, NTU**, at jake.kaner@ntu.ac.uk or on 0115 848 8131.

Appendix 15a – Participant profile: Rasa

Participant Summary: Rasa	
Biographical details:	
Age	22
Occupation	Retail/Support Spa Therapist
Self-described	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would definitely say I'm part of the YouTube generation • I am short and top heavy so will probably need adjust things • I am not a precise person by nature
Sewing situation:	
Sewing machine	Riccar Reliant 53 (second hand with no manual)
Sewing background	<p>Learnt embroidery and basic sewing stitches at school (in Lithuania).</p> <p>Often watches sewing videos online for entertainment.</p> <p>Was given a second hand sewing machine – ‘which I’m a bit scared of’</p>
Reasons for wanting to sew	<p>Fit, sustainability, creativity and self-expression</p> <p>'I am fascinated by the possibility of adjusting and/or making garments that are more sustainable and fit one's body better...I think leaning to sew would allow me to express my creativity and make my wardrobe more catered'</p>
Wants to make	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clothes that are more flowy or fitted - in contrast to skinny jeans and T-shirts that ‘don't fit too well but they cover your body’ • Things that are ‘more playful and more romantic and whimsical’
Sewing space	<p>Living room and elsewhere in flat shared with boyfriend.</p> <p>Uses the floor for cutting when no large enough table.</p>
Sewing activities:	
1 st making period	Skirt – New Look #6053 (mock-up in sheet fabric and the ‘real thing’)
2 nd making period	<p>Wrap top from YouTube video instructions</p> <p>Skirt also from video instruction and hand sewn</p> <p>Skirt – New Look #6053 skirt (continued)</p>
3 rd making period	Trying to work out a Full Bust Adjustment using online instructions and McCalls #7861 dress pattern
Project dates:	
Intro workshop	05/03/21
1 st ViEW encounter	02/04/21
2 nd ViEW encounter	08/06/21
3 rd ViEW encounter	17/08/21
In-person Workshop	Yes
Follow-up interview	05/08/22

Appendix 15b – Participant profile: Steph

Participant Summary: Steph	
Biographical details:	
Age	33
Occupation	Hairdressing (self-employed)
Self-described	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am a hairdresser by trade and have always had a creative side I got the machine in January and it's become my 'new best friend'! I've got two boys and a busy job. My other passion is running.
Sewing situation:	
Sewing machine	Amazon Basics Portable Midi Household 12 Stitch Sewing Machine Bernette b35 (loaned by project)
Sewing background	<p>Didn't grow up around anyone who sewed but always loved fashion</p> <p>Enjoyed textiles at school but focused early on hairdressing as a career</p> <p>Has made bunting, cushion covers and tried copying a kids baby grow</p>
Reasons for wanting to sew	I'd just love to be able to make my own clothes and maybe even make for other people, including my two boys. I'd like to see something in a shop and buy fabric to make it rather than buy it – eventually!
Wants to make	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A wardrobe full of dresses Just stuff that's easy, that you can wear to do everyday stuff in 'To be able to make my own fitness clothes would be a dream'
Sewing space	Kitchen and living room of house shared with husband and kids. Uses kitchen or dining tables and also floor for cutting out.
Sewing activities:	
1 st making period	Cleo Dress from Tilly and the Buttons (mock up and full garment) Pyjama trousers (from a magazine pattern without instructions)
2 nd making period	Misses' Dress - New Look #6262 – 'The Lemon Dress' 2D/3D Task
3 rd making period	Misses' Pullover Long Dress - Butterick #6051
Project dates:	
Intro workshop	10/03/21
1 st ViEW encounter	16/04/21
2 nd ViEW encounter	21/05/21
3 rd ViEW encounter	02/07/21
In-person Workshop	Yes
Follow-up interview	No

Appendix 15c – Participant profile: Wendy

Participant Summary: Wendy	
Biographical details:	
Age	41
Occupation	Events management
Self-described	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sewing has been on my list of things to do for years now • At the moment I'm a classic 'all the gear and no idea' • I'm five foot one
Sewing situation:	
Sewing machine	Brother LS14 4 years old but only recently out of the box
Sewing background	Grew up around clothes sewing but never learnt Has put together costumes in the past but nothing made to last Attended tote bag sewing workshop and has made a peg bag from a kit
Reasons to sew	I would love to be able to say 'I made this' about an outfit I'm wearing or to look at a piece of clothing and confidently be able to say 'I could make, mend or transform that' It would make my mum proud!
Wants to make	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casual things that I would wear out • Loungewear things I will always need • Dresses and jumpsuits (ultimately) that are the right proportions
Sewing space	Sitting room and bedroom of flat shared with partner. Uses floor for cutting as table space taken up by sewing machine.
Sewing activities:	
1 st making period	Margot Pyjama Bottoms from Tilly Walnes, <i>Love at First Stitch</i> (2014)
2 nd making period	Cuff Top pattern by The Assembly Line Straight stitch task
3 rd making period	Wiggle A-line Skirt (with zip) from Clothkits Pocket Skirt from Peppermint Magazine
Project dates:	
Intro workshop	12/03/21
1 st ViEW encounter	28/04/21
2 nd ViEW encounter	15/06/21
3 rd ViEW encounter	12/08/21
In-person Workshop	Yes
Follow-up interview	26/07/22

Appendix 15d – Participant profile: Jenny

Participant Summary: Jenny	
Biographical details:	
Age	44
Occupation	Advice service management
Self-described	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm one of those people who hates shopping for clothes • My top half is bigger than my hips so it's hard to find things that fit • I am a bit of perfectionist
Sewing circumstances:	
Sewing machine	Hobbycraft 19S Sewing Machine and Sewing Kit
Sewing background	No sewing experience. Wasn't interested when younger. Mum sewed before having kids. Got sewing machine for Christmas but had not used until project started.
Reasons for wanting to sew	To reduce impact (ethical/environmental) by making and altering. To spend less on 'fast fashion' and buy and alter more secondhand. As a mindful activity and creative outlet that 'I'm currently missing'.
Wants to make	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift dresses with sleeves • Nice tops that fit me properly • T-shirts or things I can wear to work
Sewing space	Spare bedroom/office of house shared with husband and new puppy. Uses available table space for cutting and sewing.
Sewing activities:	
1 st making period	Tilly & the Buttons Jaimie PJ bottoms
2 nd making period	Scout tee from Grainline studios (pattern adjustment and cutting out)
3 rd making period	Scout tee from Grainline studios (plans to complete when has time)
Project dates:	
Intro workshop	23/03/21
1 st ViEW encounter	14/05/21
2 nd ViEW encounter	27/08/21
3 rd ViEW encounter	10/01/22
In person Workshop	No
Follow-up interview	29/07/22

Appendix 15e – Participant profile: Sophie

Participant Summary: Sophie	
Biographical details:	
Age	27
Occupation	Public sector commissioning
Self-described	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have a creative flair that I don't get to use much these days Sometimes I'm a little bit of a perfectionist I don't like to leave a job half done
Sewing circumstances:	
Sewing machine	Bernette b35 (loaned by project)
Sewing background	Little or no experience – 'maybe sewed a cushion cover at school' Some familiarity with sewing through family members - Mum was good at making costumes for school plays, sister studied textiles and aunt won competitions for dressmaking when younger.
Reasons for wanting to sew	I think being able to sew even to just a basic level is a very useful life skill I also would love to be more crafty, create my own clothes and fix any that rip - I think this would be better for the planet.
Wants to make	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer dresses Camisole tops and other things I know I'll wear Also to be able to mend things and make things like cushion covers
Sewing space	Kitchen-diner in house shared with partner. Uses dining table for sewing and kitchen work surface for cutting out.
Sewing activities:	
1 st making period	Riviera Cami from Made with Mandi (cutting out and starting to sew)
2 nd making period	Riviera Cami from Made with Mandi (continued construction & finishing)
3 rd making period	Stevie Dress from Tilly and the Buttons
Project dates:	
Intro workshop	20/04/21
1 st ViEW encounter	16/06/21
2 nd ViEW encounter	10/08/21
3 rd ViEW encounter	06/10/21
In-person Workshop	No
Follow-up interview	28/07/22

Appendix 16a – Rasa’s first DIY Cut & Sew project

Edited ViEW encounter transcript telling the story of a handsewn midi skirt.

The ‘handsewn’ midi skirt

I have a lot to say about the handmade skirt because it's a bit of a disaster, but it's really funny ... I didn't really document the skirt because at first I thought it was gonna be such a quick make. Because I assume, well, I assumed as always, that according to video, just you know, setting up the one bit and then it's all done, essentially. Just to put a little elastic at the top and that's done. It was like, always going to be my little additional bit that we don't even need to talk about. But then because so many things occur I just kept ploughing through it. And well here we are, it was an interesting experience.

The idea was I've thought, Oh, I'm going to go to the B&M fabric store and I'm going to see if I can find something that's really fall-y, really drapery so that I could potentially make that skirt that [I] wanted before, following a different video because it looks very easy. But what I missed out again, which is really funny, is that I was supposed to get a stretch fabric because she was using spandex in the video. But obviously, you know, I didn't think about that because I was just like, Oh, I'm looking for drape. So I picked up this really random looking piece of cloth that just felt very drapery ... [The fabric has] no stretch at all. I mean, the tiniest bit. It's very structured. It's I [don't] know if you can tell if it's probably like a synthetic, definitely synthetic I would say. Although, I didn't ask the lady, what it's actually made of because I thought, Oh, you know, drape, great. I can't even tell you if it's weaved [sic] actually, it looks like it's almost glued together, which showed itself as an issue later on, because my sewing machine hated it. So that's why I had just to handsew it. Because it kept puckering.

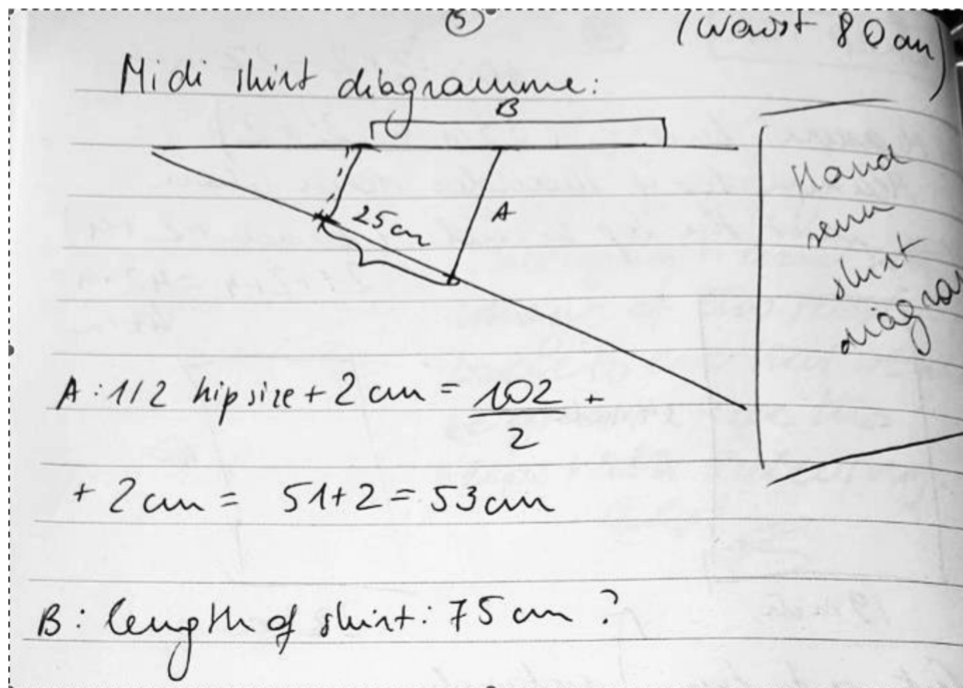


Figure 1 - Journal entry from Second Making Period (Rasa)

So we've got a square. Yeah, I think I just lined it up along the top and matched up the bits so that it was like a triangle... And I just I did the measurements by myself but obviously they just didn't quite work. So yeah, it's just that's what it looks like and then you just fold it over. So you've got, that's your waist, and then you measure the length. So that's where the troubleshooting started, because

obviously, I was like, there's no way I can sew it up all along the edge, because otherwise I won't just want to get it over [my hips]. So I need to leave some side open for some sort of fastening ... I was like, fine, but then I thought to test my stitches on a separate piece of fabric, which I'm really glad I did and realise that it [the machine] hates it, it doesn't want to do it. It's just really puckering, not going and not it's not even....and that's when I start experimenting with needle sizes, because I thought maybe it's just not the right needle. But that didn't really solve the problem, which is what caused me to have inserted my needle incorrectly for my later projects, which is how it all happened. So it's pretty funny.

But yeah, that's how I ... that's why I hand sewed it's because there was no other options like I might as well use it and see what happens. But I had some like some British Sewing Bee to go through. So that's what I was just watching Sewing Bee, hand sewing, which was ... I've done hand sewing or version of it before. So it's not like I've never held a needle in my hand. But obviously, it's very different. You know, I know what a straight stitch is on a machine. It's not the same way by hand ... So I think the stitch I was doing was backstitch, I think. Because I...what I did was I looked up ... there's this woman called Abby Cox on YouTube, she does loads of historical reproduction, so you know, hand sewing makes sense. She's a big fan of hand sewing, but she works with a [thimble] ... which obviously I ... the only thimble I have is from one of those like 'buy your sewing kits here' and nice and cheap, which doesn't fit. So you know, the whole purpose is gone.

So I developed my own way of holding the fabric, which is a little bit awkward, but I could I could do it, I did it. It's actually is sewed together. It's skirt shaped. So did actually end up doing it. So that side is not the most even thing, but it did the job and is holding. It's not, I mean, [if] somebody really pulled on it, that wouldn't be the best thing ... The next thing I did was I thought I would just cut off the top bit to increase the waist size, maybe then I can just sew it all up, and that'll be fine. But then I cut off too much and that it was too big. I don't know why. I did measure but I think just the way the fabric falls, you know the weight of it it's held in place one way, but then when you cut off and there's no more hold ...Yeah, I don't know. I ended up sewing it back up, and then do it like a weird ... that's how the waist happened. So let me show you from the inside actually, that makes more sense. So I cut it off, and then realise it's too big. So I sewed it back up again. And then I just put some stiffening ... I just put some inter-facing, and then I topstitch this bit whatever it's called. So it'd be nicer from the outside. But as you can see, it doesn't quite line up. I don't know why. With the actual ... so the waist length, even though it's the same piece of fabric, it doesn't actually line up with the skirt. I don't know why. I couldn't tell you.

It might be just because it's on the bias and it's stretched or whatever happened. Because I think that would make sense that the actual skirts stretched a little bit because it, I don't know lost the structure. Why would I staystitch? I'm handsewing. So I didn't even think about that. Because obviously it's a curve, you've cut in a curve. But I think I think to summarise, the main problem shooting areas was obviously the waist slash hip problem, actually doing the hand sewing and then it was applying interfacing the waist band was in itself was an issue. And then...there was something that I want literally mentioned literally right now ... um. I mean now technically for this to be a usable skirt, I need just need to figure out how to ... which fastening to do or have [a] separate zipper that I might try and hand sew on. Because it obviously slightly expands the area, because [it's] quite a snug fit. And then I might just do like a ruffle hem on the bottom because it's slightly too short now. Well, I want [it] to be longer. So that's that's the handsewn skirt. Big disaster, but also really fun. Like I enjoyed it.

Appendix 16b – Rasa’s second DIY Cut & Sew project

Edited ViEW encounter transcript telling the story of a wrap top.

The wrap top

And then with the next project, I was working on the mock up for the wrap shirt to test how the video [instruction] was working. And I've concluded that the video will probably not work the best. And it's good that I'd made a mock-up because when I tried it on, it was quite awkward fitting. Obviously, as a beginner, maybe you can't essentially identify what is causing the awkward shape to me whether it's the length, because I chose to make it a bit longer than she did in the video in terms of the waist. Because I was like, Oh, I don't want it to be quite cropped, just in case I need to adjust for my bust size. Because that tends to be some of these issues that I saw on people. People do bust adjustment, they usually say 'Oh, you know, we need to make the panels usually a bit longer'. So I thought I would do a bit longer and then ... it's just the sleeves are quite wide ... Obviously, the way that they should do the sleeves is probably not the way people usually do the sleeves in other clothing. Because it's not making the sleeve separately and attaching it and easing it in. It's so no little like half circle thing on the square. And I've got some diagrams, I think in the diary entries to show how it works, how it was sewn. But in terms of the project, it was hemming sewing up the two main panels and then sleeves. And the next bit should be just making the ties and then hemming the actual neck area. But now I'm not even sure if that's worth doing. If I already see it's a bit awkward.

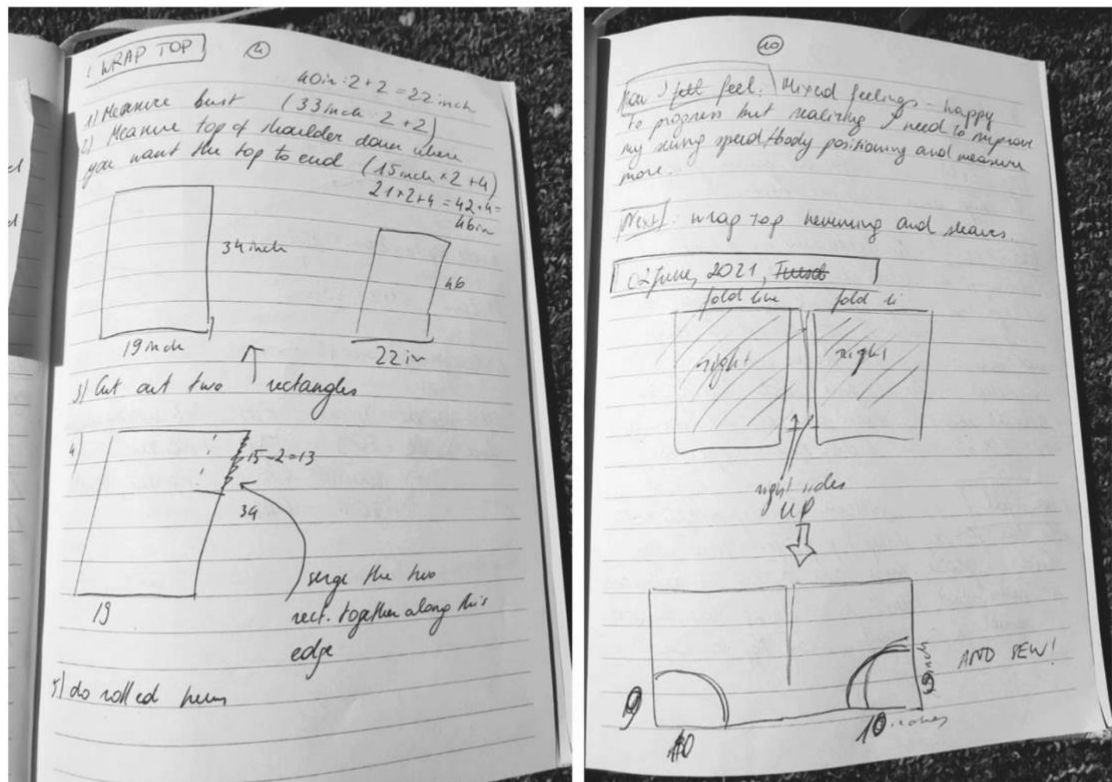


Figure 2 - Journal entry from Second Making Period (Rasa)

Drafting onto fabric

This is me trying to measure out the sleeves ... one thing that went wrong here is that I ... because she sort of said it in the video of in a very flimsy way just like, I don't know, it was nine inches somewhere and ten inches somewhere else ... I mixed them up at first. So this is me doing it wrong. But I think the most interesting thing here obviously you just see how I measure things and how awkwardly I hold the tailors chalk ... It was in the video it's like, Oh you could use a French curve.

Obviously I don't have a French curve and the way she shaped the thing looked fine but what I found very weird is that her ... in her video just looks so much more skinnier and longer and mine is quite a wide sort of thing. I've been using my own measurements according to the instructions, but the sleeve measurements I left the same as in the video because there was no logical reasoning there for me to understand how to change them. So I thought I was just gonna do it, whatever she says, I don't know if my shoulders are very different from other people.

So I use my own measurements in terms of cutting out the two rectangles ... because you need to measure bust and then you measure top of shoulder down where you want the top to end. So I guess you go like slightly diagonally, which is where the wrappy thing goes. The 'wrappy thing', as in where the ... let's go with v, that's where the v goes. So my measurements were 34 and 19 inch, so they're quite long and slightly skinny ... So you just see me here slightly struggling with the actual shape of it. But it wasn't technically that hard. I just like guess I was struggling whether I should make one edge curvier and the other one flatter or is it all a bit of a curve. So you know a French curve would probably be have been slightly useful. But I know that there's also some knowledge there that you need to have about how the French curve works because apparently you need to find the right curve and measure it or something. Yeah, a whole thing.

Sewing together

So here in this video we see them to...those two rectangles sewn together already. This is also post hemming as well, because I use the bedsheet as a mock up some bits are already hemmed for me, I didn't take them apart. And some bits were hemmed by me. And also the video, she serged them together, I don't have a serger. So she was like, you can use a straight stitch. So I just, as much as I can, to keep the kind of together I just sewed it together ... They're sewn up not all the way down but to a certain point, probably thrown up like to this. On the bottom layer, this is where it's sewn up. And then this is all ... from here on, extending over to the second layer, it's free. Because the sewn up bit is where your back is. That's technically your back panel ... Actually, upon fitting, I think I could have sewed it up a lot longer. I should have ... I think she instructed you to include...I think it was included in her instructions that the bit you sew up is ... you do some measuring according to yours, but I think it could have gone in a longer. So maybe could have adjusted a bit longer because it feels like it falls quite low on the back. Where it actually ends somewhere around here. So I could have gone even higher so I actually have a little neckline that fits a bit better. And then in terms of the sleeves, so let's see. I kept mixing up which was 9 which one was 10. So it was supposed to be nine in terms of height and 10 in terms of depth I think I'm going to say. And I actually even sewed up one of the sides wrong ... I did it up and then I just carry on to the other side. And then after this was done I look back and see which one's which and I realise, Oh actually the other one's the wrong one and I just ... redo it again after unpicking it.

I think the one issue I have with the curvature is probably the speed because I find a really difficult ... I think it's really up to my pedal, it doesn't really have a sweet spot and you can only catch it sometimes. It's never stable. So I can have a stable slower sewing speed. I'm not I'm not trying to push it out because obviously the feeding thingies are doing it for you. So that's where I'm spinning, trying to do the curve curve because obviously it's quite straight on and there's only one side that's really curved. So I'm just trying to position so it's flat in my hands and then do the sort of turning motion with my hands of the actual fabric. And what happened there was just my bobbin ended. I had no idea. That's why I tried to sew it again because I'm like, Oh maybe it's just another jam. But it's just my bobbin ended up that was all that happened. I just wound up a new one and started in the same bit ... I did feel like it went slightly better than I expected it would. Obviously, it's because it's not a straight line in general, so you can't really tell but I thought the turning motion would be a lot harder. Yeah, sometimes it's just like when you try it sort of almost like it doesn't want to give you that slow pace. So I was ... yeah. Oh, that was very fast and that's where the turning starts

happening. Yeah, it definitely looks more like a pull motion when I'm looking but when I'm doing it feels more just like a turning of the fabric and guiding it rather than try to push it or pull it through. I try to be quite gentle with it.

Fitting

So yeah, I think it's just in terms of the wrapping, it just fits a bit awkwardly and I wouldn't want to ... I think in the end it's not going to be as nice as I want it to be. So first of all, it's already awkward in the back because it's quite like gapey. And just a little v. It's not the most nice finish...And then there's quite a lot of bulk ... It should be a bit longer maybe. So that's one thing. Then the sleeves themselves, I mean, they're sleeve like, but there's a little ... this happening. This probably isn't what should be happening. It's fine, when it's horizontal. I think that there's just too much, probably maybe fabric or something. Yeah, it's still wearable. And then my idea, you would just do something that would probably go more around as well. I could shorten it because I don't really like the look of this. I made it longer just in case on my bust. I could try and just hem it up a bit. And that could potentially work. But the way it folds, I feel like shape-wise it's too rectangle all the way. Because I have quite a big bust, I don't want it to probably be just one big rectangle. I mean, it could work, because it's quite a thin fabric, so just you know, it drapes however it wants. But not ... definitely not with the other fabric. It's a bit too...Yeah, I feel like I see that the sleeve almost goes out my bust, which I don't quite want ... Yeah so she [in the video] puts it on whilst the inside of it is still there because she was like, Oh, you know, you can see if there's any awkward fit issues ... da-di-da. But I didn't really know, it definitely felt awkward because obviously there's all this extra fabric that's inside your sleeve. And I was like this doesn't really feel right at all. And I was like, well surely it's just because there's extra fabric in mine as it's very different dimensions than her. So I just cut it out and then upon, probably, another fit I'm just ... I feel like the sleeves, for me, are just too wide.

Final assessment

The thing is, this is definitely a mock-up fabric. It's not the worst thing in terms of the colour. I quite like the colour but because of the way it goes in the back, and I don't quite like it, I don't know if the end result is going to be that presentable. I might still do it, just to see what it looks like and to have something, you know, I can wear around the house if I want to. Maybe it'll surprise me as well. I think, like, darts around the bust would probably be a bit more of a better solution, in terms of fit, and having proper sleeves. But I don't know. Because yeah, I know nothing about sleeves and the way they shape. And obviously they're not rectangles at all. It's not like I could judge that well ... I think it's just the style of shirt, when it comes with my dimensions, doesn't quite work as well as it works on her. On her it looks a bit more compact and clean but when I try fit it on it's just...there's so much sleeve that's just hanging out there. It's quite long. And then when I try to do the wrap motion to see how it would lie on my body is just very much 'meh' effect [laughs]. It's a 'meh' effect. Yeah, I wasn't too impressed.

Appendix 17: Glossary of sewing terms

Backtacking: Sewing a few stitches back and forth over each other at the beginning and end of a machine stitched seam to secure it. Backtacking prevents seams from coming undone and allows the tail ends of thread at the beginning and end of each seam to be trimmed off without risking the integrity of the seam.

Bias Binding: Strips of fabric cut on the cross grain of fabric (for slight stretch) used to finish the raw edges of fabric around garment openings (e.g. neck or armholes).

Darts: Darts are wedge shaped tucks folded and sewn in various parts of a garment to create 3D form from 2D fabric. They are an essential aspect of garment and flat pattern design. Darts determine where the fullness in a garment is located. The positioning of darts can be varied for design or fit.

Ease: Refers to the difference between body measurements and the dimensions of a flat pattern or garment. Ease is necessary to allow for movement, especially in garments designed for non-stretch fabrics, and may also be added as part of the design to create a particular shape or style (i.e. loose or tight fitting).

Facings: Pieces of a garment that are attached at garment openings, such as around necklines and armholes, to simultaneously finish raw edges, add structure and prevent stretching in these areas. Facings are sewn to the outside of a part made garment (with right sides of garment and facing together) before the facing is turned to the inside of the garment where it hides raw edges and adds structure and stability to the garment opening.

Pattern notches: Small marks around the perimeter of paper pattern pieces that, when transferred to fabric at the cutting out stage, provide reference points to guide the alignment of fabric pieces in relation to each other when constructing a garment. Matching up the corresponding notches of adjoining fabric pieces ensures that they are aligned correctly and that their linear dimensions are properly distributed in relation to each other to shape the garment as per the garment design, creating volume where it is needed to accommodate a moving body.

Seam allowance: The width of fabric between the 'raw' edge of a cut garment piece and the position at which the seam is to be stitched. This width can vary but is commonly 1.5cm on printed commercial and indie patterns.

Seam finishing: The 'raw' edges of seam allowances on the inside of a garment are usually 'finished' in some way to neaten them and prevent them from fraying. Seam

finishing can be particularly important when working with woven fabrics which are prone to fray and where excess fraying might risk undermining the seam and so the structural integrity and functionality of the garment.

Staystitching: A line of straight stitching made within the seam allowance (see below) of a flat garment piece before the pieces of a garment are joined to one another. Staystitching is mostly used around curved edges, such as armholes, sleeve heads, neck and waist lines, to stabilise the fabric and prevent it from stretching out of shape in the process of handled and sewing to adjoining fabric pieces.

Understitching: A line of stitching that secures an already stitched in facing to its own seam allowance so that when it is turned to the inside of the garment and it will stay on the inside and remain out of sight rather than rolling to the outside where it will be visible. Understitching is a 'nice to have' for a better finish rather than a 'must have' which would always be conspicuous by its absence. Despite this it is a step frequently included in what are marketed as beginners' patterns.